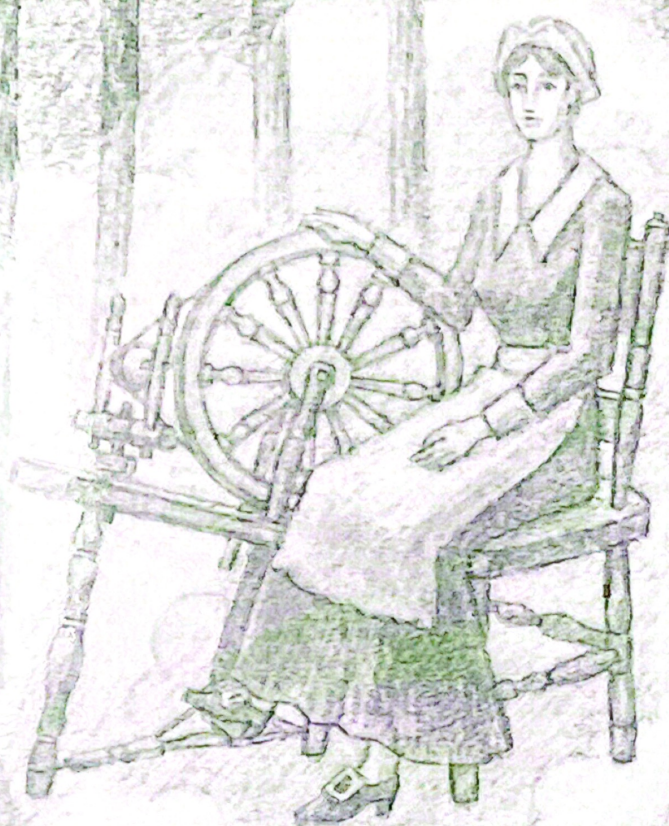


The Lost Village of the Higginbothams

Doris B. Townshend



J. Flegg

**THE LOST VILLAGE
OF THE
HIGGINBOTHAMS**

**THE LOST VILLAGE
OF THE
HIGGINBOTHAMS:
Rhoba's Story**

Doris B. Townshend

*no more
— and : end*

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FIRST EDITION

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*To Rhobadiah Higginbotham
and to all the spinsters
who spun away their lives
in anonymity*

O leeze me on my spinning-wheel,
O leeze me on my rock and reel;
Frae tap to tae that cleeds me bien,
And haps me fiel and warm at e'en!
I'll set me down and sing and spin,
While laigh descends the simmer sun,
Blest wi' content, and milk and meal—
O leeze me on my spinning-wheel!

Robert Burns

PREFACE

What prompts a person to write a historical novel? I suppose there are many subsidiary reasons, but the main one is that the author wants to share his or her view of certain people, places, and events of the past. There may be a moral or a message to be conveyed, but more than likely the urge to write comes simply from the fascination with other people's lives and how they deal with the various problems of their time and surroundings.

In writing about the Higginbotham and Randall families as seen through the eyes of the spinster Rhoba Higginbotham, I have tried to make them come alive, to treat them as human beings, not ghosts who haunt their former home sites and cemetery deep in the Pomfret woods.

Unfortunately, a mystique has grown up around this spot, the so-called Lost Village. Often before Halloween a newspaper article will appear describing "ghostly manifestations" that supposedly occur there. Believers or would-be believers in the supernatural trek through the woods to the gaping cellar holes by Nightingale Brook in the hope of being pleasantly scared, of being in touch with the occult.

Perhaps Odell Shepard started the myth when he wrote in his book *The Harvest of a Quiet Eye* (1927), referring to the Lost Village:

Here had been their houses, represented today by a few gaping cellar holes out of which tall trees were growing; but here is the Village of Voices. For the place is peopled still. . . . Although there is no human habitation for a long distance round about and no one goes there except the few who go to listen, yet there is always a hum and stir of human life. . . . They hear the laughter of children at play. . . . the voices of mothers who have long been dust calling their children into the homes that are now mere holes in the earth. They hear vague snatches of song. . . . and the rumble of heavy wagons along

an obliterated road. It is as though sounds were able in this place to get round that incomprehensible corner, to pierce that mysterious soundproof wall that we call Time.

Visitors would be disappointed at the lack of these ghostly sounds. Yes, once there was "the stir of human life" with real people living out their years in this remote place, and because of my curiosity to know more about these simple folk I decided to pierce "that mysterious soundproof wall that we call Time."

Very little has been recorded in history books about this particular locale in eastern Connecticut, other than in Susan J. Griggs's book *Folklore and Firesides in Pomfret, Hampton and Vicinity* (1950). Although my "time-travel" story can be enjoyed for itself by readers unfamiliar with the area, I believe that natives versed in the histories of Pomfret, Abington, Eastford, and Woodstock will appreciate it even more. The book can also be used by students learning about the way of life in rural Connecticut during the post-Revolution era.

The eight episodes of the tale are based on documents researched in the Connecticut State Library, the Pomfret town clerk's office, and Rhode Island libraries. They are an inventory of Obadiah Higginbotham's shop, household goods, livestock, farm implements, and personal effects, his land transactions, his debts, and the certificate releasing him from the Congregational Church in Abington; the Cranston, Rhode Island, council's list of men unable to purchase firearms or to hire a substitute to bear arms in their stead; Rhoba Higginbotham's personal and real estate inventory, her last will and testament; probate records concerning Dorcas Higginbotham's obligations as executor of her husband's property and debts; Randall land transactions. Valuable aids were vital statistics entries, the Higginbotham Bible kindly shown me by a descendant, Dorothy Horton, and of course the visible evidence of the remains of the Higginbotham settlement by Nightingale Brook, the Higginbotham/Randall cemetery, and the Randall house and barn.

Besides the educated guesses and imagination used to fill in the gaps between the known facts, I had Obadiah's and Rhoba's handwriting analyzed by an expert in that field to indicate their character.

I am grateful to my husband, Harry, for his unflagging support over the two decades of intermittent research—that even carried us to Wales—and especially for his renditions of what the Higginbotham house, barn, and shop might have looked like, based on the size and shape of their stone foundations. Also, Harry drew the pen-and-ink illustrations dividing the episodes. The present-day photos are contributions of my sons, Timothy and Hervey Townshend, who have grown up with the Higginbotham and Randall lore.

Any local historian who begs to differ with my interpretation of the long-ago happenings is free to do so. But this is my dream of how it was.

**THE LOST VILLAGE
OF THE
HIGGINBOTHAMS**

THE LOST VILLAGE: RHOBA'S STORY

I can't explain it. The thing is like a disease. What else could it be: the dizziness, the breaking out in a sweat, the quickened heartbeat, vision blurring and darkening. And then comes the inexplicable part—the “awaking” in another time in another person's body and mind.

My doctor said I had “walking pneumonia” (I didn't tell him about my visions), and he gave me a so-called wonder drug. When the malady persisted I went to a psychiatrist, thinking I might be losing my sanity. The psychiatrist pronounced my ventures into the past just dreams or even hallucinations, perhaps brought on by a nervous condition common in menopausal women. He prescribed Valium and rest.

My husband John, good practical soul that he is, had everything figured out logically. He had enough fooling around with doctors, so one evening he sat me down on a chair and lectured me.

“Cathy,” he said, “You've got to give up this obsessive research, this digging for weeks and months into the past and into the lives of people dead for almost two hundred years. It's making you sick with those dreams.”

“Which is the cause and which is the effect?” I asked with a pseudoprofessional air in an attempt to distract him. “Do the dreams, as you call them, make me sick or does my not feeling well bring on the dreams? Oh, I grant you I don't like the dizziness and palpitations. That's kind of scary. But the dreams are such an adventure. So vivid! It's like being in a time machine.”

“That's not the point. Your health is. Let me put it more bluntly. Knock it off! The whole business. And get back to normal, everyday, here-in-the-present living.”

No doubt about it, John was right about my obsession with the historical research, sitting for hours on end in town halls pouring

over old, musty pages of probate records, land deeds, and town minutes.

But there were so many questions I wanted answered about a certain family named Higginbotham, who had lived on our land in Connecticut during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

To go back a bit, nine months ago in July, John and I bought a large tract of land and a post-Revolutionary house in the country in the Township of Pomfret. The lovely old house stood by the old Boston-Hartford Turnpike. John, semiretired from his insurance company, and I, a "retired" mother, enjoyed resuscitating the ten-room, dark-red clapboard mansion from its shabby condition to its former elegance.

Being a history buff, I soon learned that the house had been built by a man named George Randall, probably around 1800. To confirm this, I found the initials G.R. on the stone around the old well in the backyard.

Pomfret natives told me there had been an earlier Randall house on top of the hill that rose in the back and that the old Post Road had run by it. Traces of the two-rod-wide road between time-worn stone walls were still evident. The house had been torn down years ago and the cellar filled in. Briars and ash trees and trailing vines of bittersweet smothered the site now, with only a granite hitching post left standing to mark the place.

More intriguing than that wisp of the past was the rumor of a little graveyard deep in the woods on our property. Although the neighbors had mentioned its existence, their directions to it were vague and founded on hearsay. In the summer I had made an attempt to follow the path that led from the highway in the direction one old-timer had indicated, but after a hundred yards, the narrow trail dwindled into the brush. The weather was against me then, too: hot, muggy, with mosquitoes singing in my ears and attacking my face. So I gave up the search at that time. But one bright, crisp day in January with an inch of crusty snow on the ground, I set out again, determined to find the graveyard.

Winter is the best time to see the lay of the land, the ridges and valleys, the slopes and hollows, the meandering course of streams.

With the tall weeds laid low and partially covered with snow, the way was fairly easy to follow, a white ribbon winding through the dark trunks of naked trees, some of them bent and gnarled apple trees, evidence of man's presence years ago. In between the tree trunks the fringy tops of sedge poked through the snow like nap on a rug. The only green punctuating the white were the thickets of laurel.

After trudging about a half a mile southward up a gentle incline, I sighted a squared-off stone wall enclosure. The granite boulders had been carefully placed to make a close-fitting wall four feet high, which seemed to be keeping the thick surrounding forest at bay. A few trees had sprouted up in the sanctuary, although they had not disturbed the six gravestones grouped in the center of the plot.

Pausing on the wide granite steps that led down to the graveyard, I read the inscriptions reverently.

DORCAS
WIFE OF
OBADIAH HIGGINBOTHAM
DIED
JULY 1st 1849
AGED 100 YRS.

MISS RHOBADIAH
HIGGINBOTHAM
DAUGH^r OF MR.
OBADIAH & MRS.
DORCAS HIGGINBOTHAM
WHO DIED AUG. 1st 1808
IN HER 31st YEAR



The Higginbotham/Randall graveyard.

DARIUS HIGGINBOTHAM

DIED

SEPT. 8, 1855

SALLY HIS 1st WIFE

DIED FEB. 16, 1812

AGED 28

MARY HIS 2nd WIFE

DIED NOV. 26, 1849

AGED 75

MRS. PATTEY RANDALL,

WIFE OF

GEORGE RANDALL

WHO DIED JANUARY

15th 1809 IN THE 32

YEAR OF HER AGE

MISS PATTY RANDALL

DIED

MAR. 30, 1893

AE. 84 YRS.

& 6 MOS.

These gravestones with their brief inscriptions became the alpha of my obsession, the beginning of my delving into the two-centuries-old past of the Higginbotham and Randall families.

At first, John was as interested as I. In fact, a few days after my discovery of the burial plot, he presented me with a book about Pomfret and vicinity written by a local historian. After dinner we settled ourselves on the sofa in front of a crackling fire and in eager anticipation turned to the page about the Higginbotham family, titled "The Lost Village of the Hills."

"That title bothers me," I fretted. "They had only two houses on either side of Nightingale Brook and two houses do not a village make."

John and I had found the two cellars, each with a small stone-lined well close by. The cellar excavations, buttressed with large

granite stones, measured twenty-eight by twenty-two feet, which indicated a modest house, probably of the story-and-a-half type common in the colonial period. In the middle of the cellar stood a massive stone chimney support, along with a couple of aging trees that had seeded themselves in the earthen floor, sprouted, grown to maturity, and now were dying. Surrounding the cellar holes were rectangular stone lintels, which had formed the foundation for the wooden houses. Interrupting the west side of the foundations was a large flat stone, the threshold for the front door. There was a barn foundation and four stone supports for a corn crib near the cellar on the west side of the brook.

"Don't be so literal, honey," John cajoled. "The author probably thought Lost Village sounded good, kind of poetic."

"Well, go on and read." Mollified, I snuggled up to him and laid my head on his shoulder. John cleared his throat and began:

"Few know that Pomfret has its lost village where long ago the large family of Higginbothams lived and carried on a thriving business, their little mill being known as the Higginbotham Linen Wheels for hand spinning. The Higginbothams lived in their little settlement in the hills cultivating their fertile farms. It is a family tradition that the first settler, Obadiah Higginbotham (1750-1803) was a deserter from the British Army. As he came to Pomfret from Cranston, R.I., he must have been stationed at Providence or Newport. Like the modern G.I., he found his bride, Dorcas, while in camp, and perhaps the fear of being separated from his little family prompted him to desert and escape to Connecticut, coming to Pomfret before 1780 as his fourth child, Darius, was born in Pomfret."

John paused. "Something doesn't ring true here. I doubt that he was stationed in Rhode Island. In my American history course I remember that the British under General Pigot didn't seize and occupy Newport until 1776. Obadiah would have been married with a family before that time. He must have been stationed elsewhere, deserted, and then settled in Rhode Island."

"Now don't *you* be a nitpicker!" I fretted. "Read on!"

"Higginbotham came to Pomfret about the same time as did Jonathan Randall, who also came from Cranston. There is no record or tradition regarding this coincidence, yet it seems

plausible that there was a tie between the two families as the Randalls were buried in the little Higginbotham burying ground."

"That we know," I murmured, then sat up straight and blurted: "But what I don't understand is why Pattey Randall and her daughter are buried there but no other Randalls. And why no gravestone for old Obadiah? And where was he stationed? What regiment was he in? And why didn't Rhobadiah marry? She was a spinster at thirty-one. Was she plain or downright ugly or deformed? Did she perhaps have a lover who was killed prematurely or didn't she find any of the local boys to her liking? The goal of most girls in those days was to be married."

"Not much different than today," John commented with a smile and laid down the book. "Well, anyway, we learned that Obadiah bought land here, built a cabin, farmed, made spinning wheels, and raised children. And that's that. A long-ago happening. Nothing to concern us."

"That's just it, John. Somehow it does concern me. I mean, I want to know the why and wherefores. I feel compelled to find out."

John looked at me strangely. He knew my single-mindedness, my determination to get to the bottom of things. Perhaps he was remembering the time my friend Ruth and I conducted an ESP experiment for one solid week. For hours every day we sat quietly at a table facing each other and using five cards with symbols on them—star, moon, cross, triangle, and wavy line—we concentrated on transmitting the symbols by thought process from one brain to the other. Ruth would hold a card, not visible to me, and closing her eyes she would picture the symbol in her mind, silently saying its name over and over again, trying to beam it to me.

I also closed my eyes, opening my mind to reception, and waited for a symbol to appear to my inner sight. At first we took turns, but my unusually high percentage of correct answers so thrilled us both that I continued as receiver. I had always suspected that I was blessed with extrasensory perception.

John pooh-poohed the idea, saying it was just chance, lucky guesses. As for finding out about the long-ago happenings of the Higginbothams, his comment was: "Don't let it get out of hand." That closed the subject as far as he was concerned. But it wasn't finished for me. Sherlock would have to do without her Watson, I

resolved. So I began my sleuthing alone.

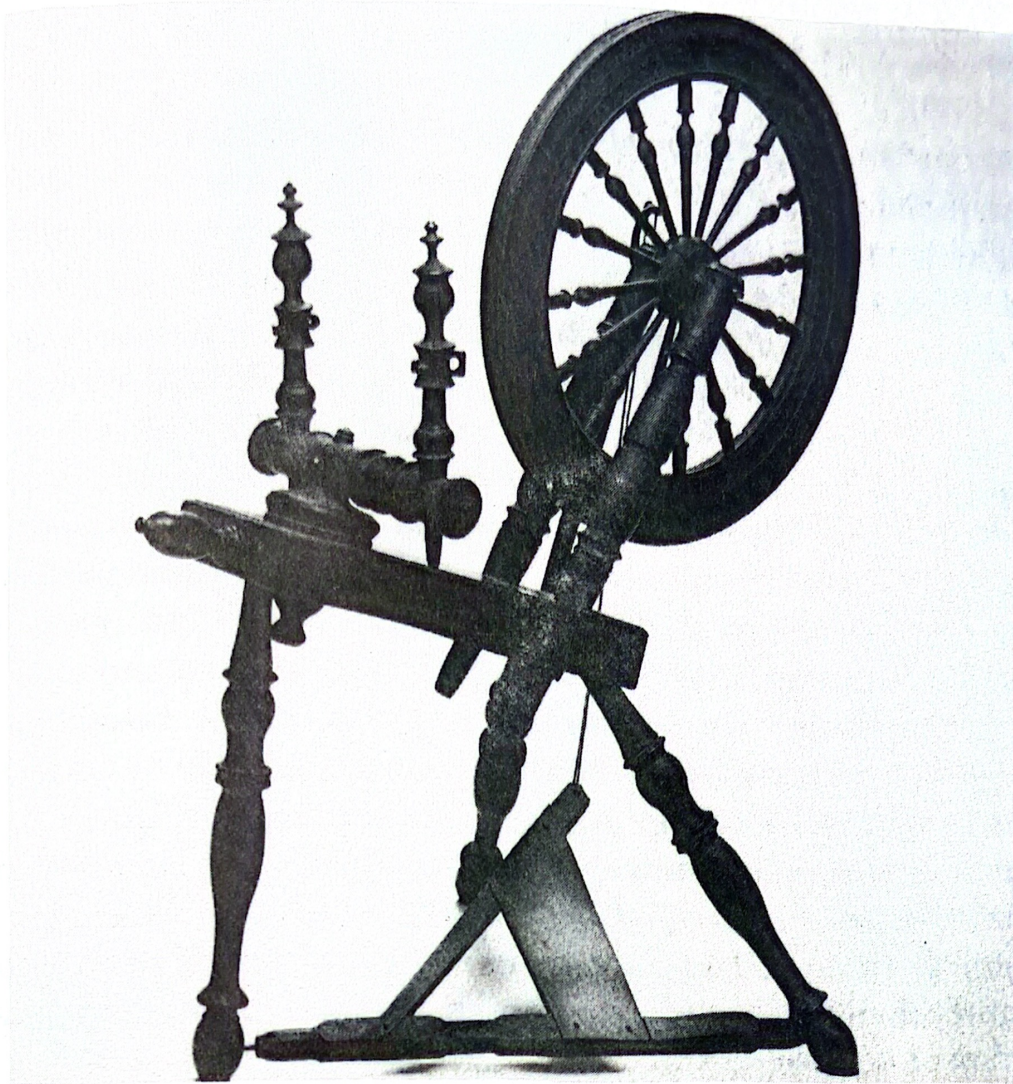
Documentation about the Randalls was not very difficult to come by. With the information that Jonathan Randall had come from Rhode Island, I concentrated my research there and found that he had been a prominent man in affairs of that colony. His gravestone in Providence read: "In memory of the Hon. Jonathan Randall, Esq. who departed this life at Pomfret, March 20th A.D. 1791 in the 86th year of his age. He sustained several important offices in this state with honor to himself and advantage to his country."

Other statistics were that he was born in Cranston on March 20, 1706, married Patience Bowen of Rehobeth, Massachusetts, on June 12, 1737, and sired five children, three girls and two boys. He was a wealthy aristocrat and was listed in both the Cranston and Pomfret census as having slaves. On November 13, 1776, Mr. Randall bought from Alexander Sessions 220 acres in Pomfret at a cost of £950. The farm included a dwelling house, barns, and other outbuildings. Apparently, he had anticipated the British invasion of the vulnerable Rhode Island coast and had prepared a safe haven for his family. This then was the house that used to sit on top of the hill in back of us.

George Randall, who built our house, turned out to be the grandson of Jonathan Randall and the son of Captain James Randall and Phoebe (Williams). George was born in Cranston in 1769 and died in Abington, Connecticut, in 1857. The meticulously copied wills of the Randalls were on file in the town clerk's office in Pomfret as were their many land transactions. The only records I lacked were the maiden name of George's first wife, Pattey, and when and where they were married. His second wife was Phebe Ward, born in Ashford, Connecticut.

Researching the Higginbothams was a different story. Documentary evidence was as scarce as hen's teeth, but I did unearth three helpful pieces of information.

The first came when I found a descendant of Obadiah living in the area. Graciously, she showed me the ancient family Bible with the names of all Obadiah's and Dorcas's eight children. There was Elisha, Rhobadiah, Obadiah, Jr., Darius, Phebe, Achsah, Ziba, and Augustus Israel. Rhobadiah was recorded as born in Cranston



Obadiah Higginbotham's spinning wheel. *Old Sturbridge Village photo by Henry E. Peach.*



Stencil on Obadiah Higginbotham's spinning wheel. *Old Sturbridge Village photo by Henry E. Peach.*

on May 22, 1778, and Darius, the first born in Pomfret, on December 1, 1780.

According to my informant, it was family tradition that Obadiah had come from Wales.

The second stroke of luck was when I discovered in the 1774 Rhode Island census under Cranston the following: "Obadiah Higginbotham 1 male above 16, 1 male under 16, 1 female above 16." This was positive proof that Obadiah and Dorcas, both then twenty-four, and their two-year-old son, Elisha, had actually lived in Cranston and were there *before* the Revolution.

The third welcome addition to my pitiful store of facts came unexpectedly. A friend sent me a newspaper article about spinning wheels being sent from the Sturbridge Village Museum to Thailand in a self-help program. Accompanying the article was a photo of the type of spinning wheel from Sturbridge to be sent. Lo and behold, the caption noted that the wheel had been made by Obadiah Higginbotham! A quick trip to Sturbridge verified this. How thrilled I was to see a spinning wheel made by his very hand! With its fine workmanship, it stood out among all the other wheels in the large storeroom. The curator did not know anything of its history other than that the wheel was of the Saxon type, used in spinning flax or cotton.

Armed with these facts, bringing me closer to the Higginbothams, I decided one rather raw morning in March to walk to the so-called Lost Village and soak in some atmosphere, to commune with the spirits of bygone days.

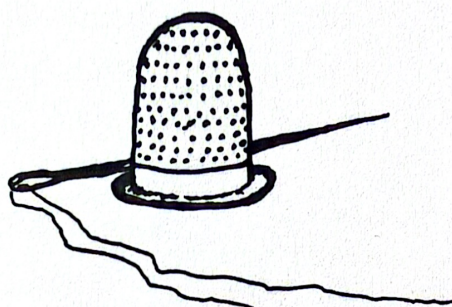
The sky was a faded blue with some bleary clouds on the horizon. The air was chilly with a nagging little breeze that tugged at my kerchief. I was foolish to have worn sneakers what with my heavy cold, plus a dull headache, because the ground was still soggy with melted snow and squishy mud. Although skunk cabbage poked its purple tongue up in the boggy spots and the willows were greening, spring was just sending a calling card and had not arrived yet. Winter still hugged the earth.

I passed the graveyard, cleared now of the intruding hickory and oak trees by my obliging husband. After ten minutes of fast walking on the leaf-strewn path, hopscotching on damp stones over a swollen brook, I arrived at the cellar hole on the west side of

Nightingale Brook. My head throbbed unmercifully, and I was perspiring and shallow-breathed.

The three broad granite steps that led down the wooded slope to the brook from the cellar site looked inviting, with sunlight coming through a space in the treetops like a spotlight on the uppermost step. There I ensconced myself, wrapping my Icelandic sweater tightly around me, with the hem of it drawn around my knees. The wind had died down, barely stirring the skeletal trees. With the warmth of the sun on my head, I found myself drowsing in a delightful kind of stupor, knowing I could awake at any time but not wanting to yet awhile.

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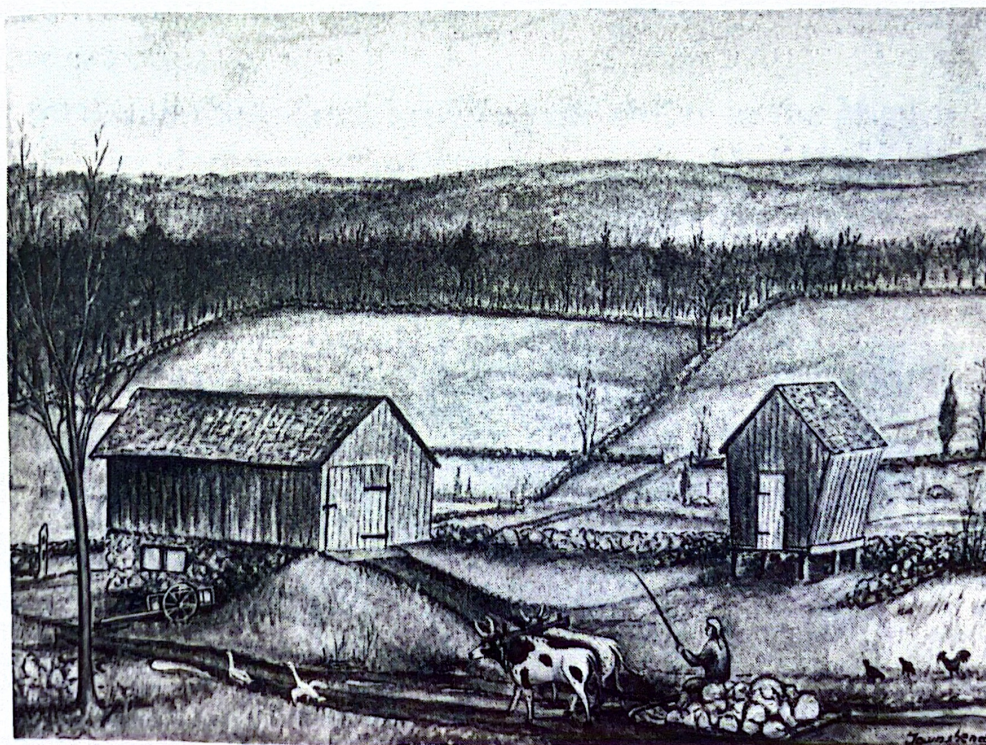


"Rhoby, hurry up! Everyone is waiting." Achsah, bossy as an old fishwife, ran from the house to the stone steps where I sat sewing a button on Ziba's pantaloons. He was cuddled up next to me in his long drawers, his brown eyes concentrated on my fingers as they poked the needle up and down through the buttonhole. He had graduated from dresses over a year but at four was still awed by wearing real pants, even though they were Darius's old blue linsey-woolsey ones turned inside out onto the unfaded side.

"Mother says the service will be at noon and the sun is almost over the lane now." Ziba jumped up, always obedient to sister Achsah's sharp voice. In so doing, he jostled the scissors and thimble out of my lap into the heap of withered leaves blown around the steps. The scissors I saw at once but not my prized copper thimble.



Imaginary reconstruction of Higginbotham house. *Illustration by Harry Townshend.*



Imaginary reconstruction of Higginbotham barn and corn crib. *Illustration by Harry Townshend.*

"Come on, Rhoby!" Ziba pulled at my apron. "Help me button my pants."

"You can find that thimble later," Achsah snapped. "Father says it is very important for us to be on time for Judge Randall's funeral."

The family was gathered in the lane in front of the house when Ziba and I joined them. All except for Mother. At the last minute she had hurried inside to get her red wool shawl. The March wind had a bite to it, she complained, and her new calico dress and paisley shawl, fashionable as they were, did not fend off the cold.

Father looked grand in his satin breeches, green waistcoat and vest, black stockings, and broad-brimmed felt hat. He still wore the old-style breeches when most men were changing to the long, narrow trousers. I was proud of him that he could work in the grimy shop making spinning wheels, do the messy farm chores, and still look like a gentleman when he wore his Sunday-best clothes.

But I knew his thoughts were not on his appearance as he stood admiring our sturdy new house with the smoke from the morning cooking fire still trailing from the tall brick chimney. Sunlight glistened on the red-painted clapboards and bounced off the glass of the windows, two on each side of the iron-hasped door. Even the four young maples, planted in front of the house according to custom, added to the fresh aspect of our home.

The whole family had been privy to the discussions about buying one hundred acres on this west side of Nightingale Brook. The land was finally conveyed to Father on January 1st last year. Mr. John Trowbridge and Mr. Seth Grosvenor held the mortgage of \$156. That was a lot of money. I worried how it would ever be paid off. Rent from our other house on the east side of the brook would be a help. I was not sorry to leave that house on the bluff. It was smaller, and with the births of Darius, Phebe, Achsah, and Ziba in the ten years since we had come from Cranston, there was not room enough. Besides, here we had a splendid barn for our old piebald horse and the cows.

"Darius, did you put hay in for the oxen and cows?" As Father spoke, Darius nodded and brushed bits of hay off his linen shirt and pantaloons to emphasize the fact.

"And how about the sheep? Are they all accounted for in the fold?" Again Darius nodded and grabbed ahold of the collar of our faithful collie, Cyrus, to lead him over to the small stone enclosure where the sheep were bunched up, staring at us with docile eyes.

"Stay, Cy!" Obedient as always, the dog lay down near the wall, head on his paws, a woebegone expression his face.

Father turned to sunny-faced seven-year-old Phebe, who was busy smoothing down her blue-and-white striped petticoat.

"Phebe, did you slop the pigs?"

"Oh, Father, we have taken off our aprons and we do not wish to soil our fine gowns." Obadiah smiled and patted her blond head. "Well, *we* can put our aprons on after the funeral and then do that chore. Don't forget. And I must remind myself to ring the big boar or he will gouge up Dorcas's garden. Here comes herself now, so let us get started."

The family set off on the rutted, muddy path headed northward. We all wore our clogs because of the soggy ground, but we carried our brogans to put on when we arrived at the Randalls. Father and Darius strode ahead, with the rest of us following at a sedate gait. Patches of snow still clung to the brown leathery oak leaves in the hollows of the fields where they had blown. The air had the breath of an icehouse to it, but the sky was a brilliant blue and the sun glittered brightly, if not warmly.

"I remember how kind Judge Randall was to me. And Mrs. Randall, too," Mother said as she slowed her pace to fit Ziba's short steps. I knew she was in the mood for one of her long reminiscences.

"I was taken into the Randall household when I was thirteen. Just your age, Rhobadiah." (I liked Mother calling me by my christened name. It sounded so grown-up. Everyone else called me Rhoby.) "My father, Thomas Green, had died, leaving my mother with eight children to care for. Most of us was bound out." We all listened attentively as we tramped along, always interested in the olden days.

"We was terrible poor. My father had been but a day laborer. That was in the winter of seventeen sixty-three when I left home and come to the Randalls. The Randall girls, Martha and Hannah, was already married and away but Polly was to home. She was only

two years older than me. James, the oldest son, was married and a captain in the militia. Then there was poor Jonathan, junior, God rest his soul, dead now these six years." She stopped to pull her shawl close over her broad shoulders, then continued.

"I helped Mrs. Randall in the big house. I did everything—cooking, cleaning, polishing, washing. They entertained a lot because Mr. Randall was very active in Providence and Rhode Island affairs. They did have some slaves. The Lambert family. Well, you know them. But I directed them," she said with pride. "There was always people coming and going we had to feed." She paused, lost in her thoughts for a moment, then took a deep breath and went on.

"Everything was going along pretty good. The years went by quickly what with the seasons' chores and all. It was in seventeen seventy-five we got really anxious about the trouble with England, us being on the coast and not too far from Boston where we heard of the citizens' rebellion. Mr. Randall and the other magistrates was trying to enlist men for the defense of the colony, even trying to get the slaves to enlist. They would have had their freedom and the same wages as the Continental soldiers. Pompey Lambert did not want to go even for the three-month sign-up. Mrs. Randall and me was glad for that. We did collect donations for the relief of the poor folk in Boston, suffering in the glorious cause of liberty. Provisions was short for everybody. Especially salt."

We were all bunched around Mother now, our progress along the path slowed to a shuffle. Her gray eyes shone brighter, and she smiled when she said: "But to go back before that time, it was in the spring of seventy-one when I first saw him."

"Who?" Achsah asked.

"Your father. I had the upper door open in the kitchen, letting out the smoke. Like a silly goose, I had burned the bacon in the fry pan on the hearth and was flapping a towel to drive the smoke out. There he was, leaning on the bottom door, grinning. 'Trying to burn the house down are ye, lass?' he said. Oh, he were a saucy one, but right away I thought him quite fetching with his reddish-brown hair, his brown eyes that twinkled, and his manly figure. He was—is—not a big man, not any taller nor me, but so straight and brawny and full of spirit."

"I cannot imagine Father being saucy. He is always so serious

and he argues a lot about what people say and do," Achsah flashed, as if she knew it all.

"Working hard feeding and clothing a big family tends to wear a body down and make them serious," Mother retorted.

"Our family is not so big. There is just you, Father, Rhoby, Darius, Achsah, me, and little Ziba." Phebe ticked the number off on her fingers. "That is seven. Oh, and Elisha. That makes eight. I keep forgetting he has gone. Probably for good since it is a year now."

All of us were silent, remembering the scene that morning last April when Elisha, not yet eighteen, faced Father by the fireplace. He had gotten up earlier than Mother, at the first cock crow, stirred the fire, and put on a cart-size log. Us girls, still sleepy-eyed, had climbed down from the loft. Mother and Father came out of the bed chamber and looked with surprise at Elisha, who was usually the last up from his corner in the kitchen next to Darius's pallet.

The bulky cloth-covered bundle sitting on the round table by the door told the tale. It was not a wonder that the time had finally come when Elisha would go off on his own. He had often threatened it. He was cussedly independent, just like Father. The two were a pair in character as well as appearance.

"What are you taking?" Mother asked and started to untie the corners of the cloth. She knew there was no use arguing against Elisha's decision; he was so quietly determined where always before he would grouse and grumble.

"Don't undo it, Mother. I have enough of what I need." For a moment his eyes filled with tears as he put his hand on hers.

Father was not as complacent. He hit the table with his fist, making the bundle bounce. His mouth became a thin line, his pointed nose thrust forward, and the muscles in his jaw worked. I did not like to see him that way, the way he got when he was truly angry.

"By thunder, where are you going?! When will you be back? You know we have the ploughing for the flax ground in the new field and the sowing of the peas, rye to be threshed, wood to be cut, and—"

"Darius will just have to help you more, Father." Easygoing Darius, big for his ten years, smiled and ducked his head. "And

maybe one of the Cunningham or Hicks boys can give you a hand. I just know I cannot stay around here anymore. I have to be my own man." Father glared at him but said nothing more. Then Elisha shook hands with each of us, gave Mother a hug, and picked up his bundle.

"You forgot to say good-bye to Ziba," Phebe piped up. For the only time that morning Elisha smiled. He went to the chamber and peeked in at Ziba, slumbering peacefully in the trundle bed. "I won't wake him," Elisha whispered, and strode out the door and down the lane.

"But where will you go?" Mother persisted, calling after him.

He stopped and thought a minute. "Probably I will go a-coasting from Norwich for a spell. Then it could be I will head west to Marietta, Ohio, and join Colonel Putnam. I will send word by the post someday." With this promise, he waved a final good-bye and jogged out of sight.

That was the last we saw of our brother. No letter arrived from him either, though we asked at Sumner's Inn every time we passed. Of course, Elisha was a poor hand at writing anyway, not as good as me, but that was because he had played hookey from school more often than not. When Master Hubbard would rap his knuckles with a willow stick for his messy writing and ciphering, Elisha would turn on his heel and stalk out the door without a backward glance.

We had walked as far as the big flat rocks that bridged the little ice-rimmed brook when Mother broke the silence. "Yes, Elisha can no longer be counted in the family." She paused. "Then there was another child." Her eyes softened with the memory. "Little Obadiah. Born on November third in the year seventeen seventy-five. He was a sickly babe from birth, crying all the time, poor little tyke. The following June there was an outbreak of smallpox and he came down with it. I nursed him in the pesthouse until he died. He was only nine months and two weeks when the Lord took him."

She sighed, then straightened her shoulders and started briskly up the sloping path. "Elisha was almost three at the time, and it was his wild running about getting into everything that kept me from grieving too much. Him and then the British. They landed a big army at Newport on December sixth. Obadiah heard there were six thousand soldiers, some of them being Hessians from Ger-

many. We was all so anxious, being only about twenty-five miles from Newport Island. After that, times was really hard with shipping trade cut off."

"Did Father fight the Redcoats?" Ziba chirped.

"Let's not talk for a while, children. I am out of breath from talking and climbing up this hill." She took a deep breath and patted her forehead with a corner of her shawl. "There is your Father and Darius up ahead. You ask him."

At the top of the incline the two were sitting on the stone wall that surrounded what was to be our graveyard. Although the burial ground was pleasant enough amid the fields, with a brook winding around the bottom of the hill and with a view of the Ragged Hills on the west, I felt sad to think who might be buried there next. Two little graves, marked with field stones, were already there, stillborn babies of the Randalls' slaves, the Lamberts. Their son, Cato, was also buried there. He had been kicked in the head by a horse and fell down dead. Father always told us not to get too near the back of a horse. Well, at least none of our family was here yet. And Judge Randall's body was to be carted to Providence to be buried.

"Did you fight the Redcoats, Father?" Ziba ran up to him and wrapped his arms around Father's legs.

"We was just waiting for you slowpokes to catch up," Darius interjected. Obadiah gently unfastened Ziba's hold on his legs and hoisted him to his shoulder.

"No, son," he answered. "Someday I will tell you about me and the British. Now we had better move along or we will be late."

"Tell me, too!" Darius and I both spoke at once. "I have never heard the whole story, just bits and pieces," I added. "And my friends are always asking me if it is true you were a deserter from the British Army."

Father scowled. "What they don't know will not hurt them. We Higginbothams do not go gadding about telling our business. And don't you forget it, miss!" With that he marched off, leading the way over the ridge, down through the swampy meadow and on up the long hill through the orchard to the Randalls' big blue house by the Middle Post Road.

Many people had already gathered on the lawn by the side of the house. I knew most of them, especially my schoolmates and

those who attended the meeting house in Abington, but those from Pomfret I had only heard of or saw occasionally when they came to buy one of Father's spinning wheels.

We kept close to Mother except for Darius, who wandered off with the Esterbrook boys, and Father, who saw his friend Jesse Bolles from Woodstock and hurried over to talk with him, probably about the Baptists. They were forever discussing about religion and the injustice of an established church. What did Parson Lyon call them—dissenters? People who believed differently than the Congregationalists and would not abide by their rules. It did not matter to me that Father was one of the dissenters, but I preferred the dignity and formality of the Congregational service to the plainness and clamor of a Baptist service. So did Mother. But Father was strong-willed so we usually did as he said.

Mother whispered to us the name of each person in the throng. She nodded and smiled tentatively at them like she was reminding herself that there was a dead man laid out in the house and she must not appear other than sad. Yet Judge Randall had lived to a ripe old age, eighty-six, and had enjoyed a full, rich life. That is what she had told us several times.

"There is Mr. Lemuel Grosvenor, the portly gentleman over by the big maple, and his wife, Eunice, beside him. Mr. Angell and Mistress Phyrilla are talking with them. Is not her lustring gown beautiful? So glossy and fine. Oh, and over there in a bunch like always are the Chandlers. I see Charles and Samuel and Silas and Peter."

She turned her head slowly, scanning the crowd. "Over by the well. That is Thomas Grow from Hampton, or is it his cousin James? Ah, yes. It is James, the Baptist minister and schoolmaster. Thomas left for New Hampshire when he ruffled the feathers of some of his Baptist brethren, I heard. James took over his society then."

Mother prattled on, scarcely noticing she had lost her audience. Ziba was hunched down on the matted grass playing some sort of game with pebbles. Phebe and Achsah had eased away to be with the Wheaton children. I felt duty-bound to stay. Besides, I was truly interested in who was who.

"I see Seth Chase with Eliza coming out of the house. And Captain Ben Ruggles. You know he is widowed with two young boys to

care for. What a pity! But some spinster will snatch him up quick, I warrant. Behind him comes Samuel Spring of Ashford. He bought the Caleb Grosvenor farm on the hill east of here, and right in back of him is John Grosvenor from the foot of the hill.

"Oh, look, Rhobadiah!" She jiggled my arm. "There is the Widow Esterbrook. Poor thing! She has failed badly this past year. She can barely walk without—"

"Mother," I interrupted. "Mrs. Randall is coming out of the house now with Dr. Knight and Parson Lyon. She looks so sad and old, all bent over and wrinkled. Should you not have gone in to pay your respects to the bereaved family?"

"Later, Rhobadiah. I want to be last so I can help tidy up and have a longer time with Mrs. Randall. Let the gentry pay their respects first." She darted a proud glance at me. "Bereaved family! How you do like to use those grown-up words! But then you always had an old head on young shoulders."

I hardly heard her, so intent was I on the next person stepping out of the front door. George Randall, Mr. Randall's grandson. He was so handsome, fair-haired, tall, and well built, with a direct gaze from his deep-set blue eyes that made me shiver in my shoes. He was nine years older than me and probably did not even remember my name. He visited here occasionally, and I saw him only when I had an errand up Randall way. His home was in Johnston, Rhode Island, but Father told me he had come with his grandparents as a child during the War of Independence and had learned to love our area.

George escorted Amy, his cousin Jonathan junior's widow, now Mrs. Francis Maguire. Amy's youngsters, Hannah, Polly, and Jencks, trailed behind.

Just as the mourners were collecting in front of the minister, a shiny black chariot drawn by a young black mare came wheeling up the road, bumping and rocking in haste. It stopped and Captain Peter Cunningham jumped down from the driver's seat to hand down his regal wife. Everyone was aware that the captain had married well and that the former Miss Elizabeth Pierpont of Boston was wealthy in her own right. Catching her stylish black silk skirt in her gloved hand, Mrs. Cunningham stepped gracefully out of the carriage with an apologetic smile for their late arrival.

Mr. Walter Lyon from our church said the opening prayer with his face turned up to the sky and his hands folded in front of him. Even though he spoke loud and precisely, my mind wandered. I loved the view from this hill. Far in the distance you could see the long line of the smoky-blue ridge that lay over the other side of the Quinebaug River in Rhode Island. Today it looked so blue that I pretended it was the ocean. In the near distance were dark gray thickets of woods, with here and there tall spruce and hemlock poking up green triangles. The hills to the west, the Ragged Hills, had a patchwork of fields on their slopes embroidered with stone fences. Some fields were yellowed and stained from winter while others were brown, already spread with manure. Right below us was pastureland, threaded with the runoff of snowbanks. A mourning dove cooed softly in one of the apple trees. Surely, spring would soon be here.

With the lengthy prayer finished, our chorister, Dr. Elisha Lord, announced the hymn, *Old Hundredeth*, and led off the tune. I knew the words but could not carry a tune, and Phebe, who pressed against me, had a sweet voice but never could remember the words. So I spoke them while Phebe hummed as loud as she could.

The eulogy was given by Colonel Joseph Nightingale, a Rhode Islander as Judge Randall had been.

"First and foremost, let it be said that he served his country well. The Honorable Jonathan Randall, like the great patriot General Israel Putnam, so recently among us and now his place shall know him no more, like him Mr. Randall gave of his time and talents in many capacities. As a senator to the General Assembly of the Colony of Rhode Island, as the moderator many times at town meetings in Cranston where he resided, as assessor, councilman, treasurer, and grand juror in the Superior Court. On June sixteenth in seventeen seventy-six, he signed a document along with other patriots, which asserted the belief that we must continue in resistance to Great Britain as a matter of economic necessity, honor, and moral rectitude.

"Then when the threat to life and liberty in Providence and surrounding towns became unbearable and with the retreat of General John Sullivan and the American Army from its siege of

Newport and after the terrible storm on August eleventh in seventy-eight, when the gallant French Admiral Count D'Estaing left the scene to sail to Boston for repairs, never having done battle with Lord Howe's fleet . . ."

"Mother," I whispered. "Is he what you call long-winded?" She frowned and shushed me while Colonel Nightingale droned on.

". . . So in August of seventy-eight Judge Randall gathered his family and servants, his herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, his household goods and made his weary way to this fair place, which he had bought from Alexander Sessions in anticipation of dangerous times. Here in our state, although he was advanced in years, he continued to make himself available for civic duty. At the venerable age of eighty-two, still keen with his wits unimpaired, Judge Randall journeyed to Hartford to the state convention in the company of Simon Cotton to represent us in the momentous deliberations concerning the ratification of the Constitution of these United States, which unfortunately, as you know, Pomfret and Windam did not ratify at that time."

Father, who had joined us, mumbled under his breath: "He is getting far off the subject, the old windbag." In truth, the crowd was becoming restless, shifting from one foot to the other and making comments behind their hands.

The growing inattention finally dawned on Colonel Nightingale, and after making a brief reference to the honor paid Judge Randall when General Washington stopped by his house on that memorable day of November 7, 1789, he concluded by extending an invitation on behalf of Mrs. Randall to stay and partake of some simple refreshments. The Reverend Walter Dodge from the Pomfret Congregational Society read the Twenty-third Psalm and closed with an eloquent prayer for the soul of Mr. Randall. Immediately, the Randall servants and several of the neighborhood women brought cups of mulled cider, and trays of little cakes and sweetmeats from the house.

After proper leave-taking, the family groups drifted in the direction of their homes, still exchanging pleasantries and news with their friends. It was not often there was a break from routine except for Sabbath services, funerals, and weddings. Darius and I collected the younger children and with Father and Jeremiah Field and his family started down the hill. Mother said she would remain

behind to be with Patience Randall for a while.

"I remember seeing General Washington in his carriage on the post road," Mr. Field remarked. "He had an elegantly dressed coachman in front, two footmen in back, and four servants following on horseback. It was in the morning and he had just come from Colonel Thomas Grosvenor's house in Pomfret Street and was on his way to Ashford. I was driving the cows to pasture when he rode by. The general is truly a great leader. He gave us our independence. Of course, with the aid of other noble patriots like Colonel Grosvenor and General Putnam."

Father voiced his agreement and after a respectable silence due the great men, he pointed to the dung-strewn field on the hillside. "It will be time to plough soon. I don't suppose old Mrs. Randall will run the farm or that her son James will come from Rhode Island to take over."

"No, it will be her grandson, young George, I have heard."

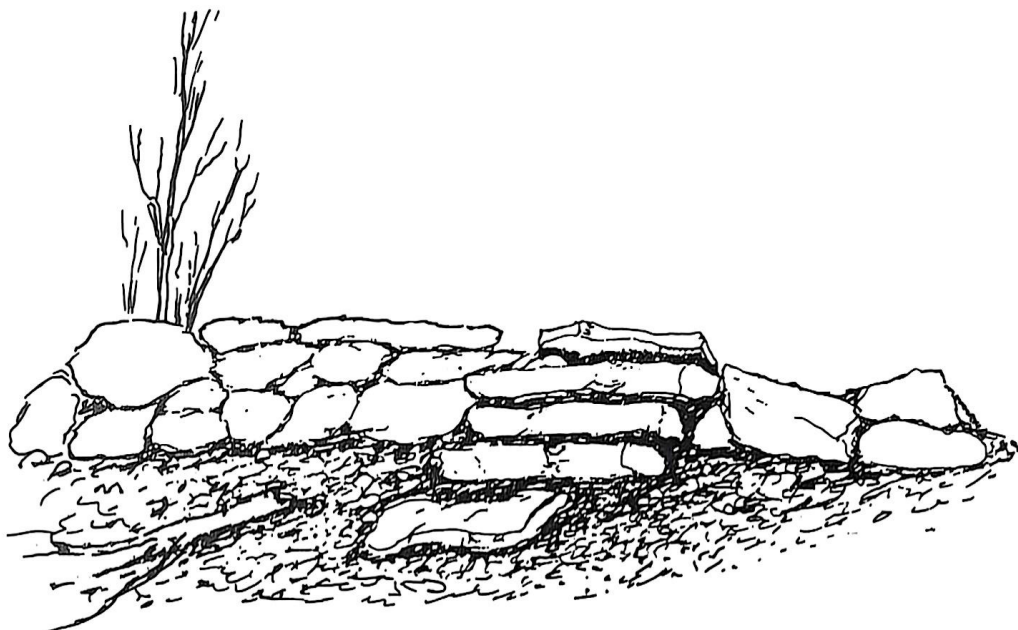
A native Rhode Islander, Jeremiah Field always seemed to know the latest of what went on in that state and of its prominent inhabitants. "Ever since George was a boy, he has loved this place. The other grandson, Samuel, is not interested in leaving his home in Johnston, so I imagine George will buy out any shares Sam has in the inheritance."

This bit of good news made my heart race. George to be our permanent neighbor! There would be so many ways I could be useful to him. I was already one of the best spinners and weavers in the parish, I boasted to myself as I hurried home ahead of the others. Supper would be my responsibility with Mother absent. But first I must find my thimble.

Hastening toward the steps where she had sat sewing Ziba's pantaloons, Rhobadiah, careless of her footing, suddenly slipped on a leaf-covered stone and fell flat on the ground.

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A gust of wind tore off a dead limb from a nearby tree, sending it to the ground with a thud. The sound woke me up abruptly. Shivering and coughing, I stretched my cramped legs and got up. The clouds were full upon the sun now, squeezing it into a fuzzy ball. While I watched, the blurry disk was sucked up and swallowed



whole. A fresh wind began to twitch the treetops.

"It's home for you, lass," I scolded myself, and gave my drippy nose a hard blow. A nice, hot bath and a stiff drink will do wonders for this cold. But first I must hunt for my thimble.

Now where did I get that odd thought? Then it came to me, the entire dream. In place of the little red cottage was the gaping cellar hole with its huge chimney foundation and two old trees rooted in the earthen floor. The four maples alongside the lane were not tender saplings but ancient hollowed trunks with only a few living branches. Yet the happening seemed so real that I half expected one of the Higginbothams to come walking through the trees, calling me Rhoby.



That night when John and I were in bed, lying side by side, and with the undistracting gloom of night to aid my memory, I told him of my adventure into the past. Not every detail, just the outline. He listened quietly, then, with disbelief in his voice, said: "I never heard of a dream lasting so long—and so logically. Most dreams are illogical, weird. You know—dreamlike."

"I agree. My dreams are usually fragmented and vague, but not this one."

"It's interesting that you should have put yourself in Rhobadiah Higginbotham's place. For one thing, she was so much younger than you, barely a teenager at the time you're talking about." He turned on his side to stare at me through the darkness. "I have to admit your tale or dream is fascinating. Sort of a reward for all your hours of research."

He was silent for a moment. "Tell me. While you were supposedly Rhobadiah were you aware of being Catherine Williams of the twentieth century?"

"No," I replied slowly, mulling over the concept, trying to think of a way to explain. "It is like being a good actor, or rather actress. Someone who throws herself wholeheartedly into a role and becomes that character for the time being. Then, after the play or movie is over, she disassociates herself but can remember every line, every movement, every emotion and thought."

"Well, that answers that! I guess you're just a damn fine actress." And so saying, John rolled over, plumped up his pillow, and went off to sleep. I lay awake a long time, confused but exhilarated. My explanation wasn't really on target. There was something more to it. Something indefinable.

Naturally, I was eager to see if my dream would be repeated or, better yet, continued. But a month passed before I was able to get free of community and family obligations.

It was late in April when I set out one morning on the now well-trodden path to the Lost Village. This time I was warmly dressed in a long padded jacket with a hood and shod in rubber-soled boots because my cold, in spite of the doctor's prescription, persisted. A fine rain was falling, not even qualifying as rain, more like a gentle mist, but the air was warm. Certainly the weather was not a deterrent to the outing.

When I reached the forlorn little graveyard, I perched on the stone steps and waited. The enveloping silence and mist closed in on me, womblike. I stared intensely at the gray, dripping grave-stones as if the power of my fixation could conjure up living flesh. I tried to recall the faces I had seen from the distant past, to hear the voices. Nothing.

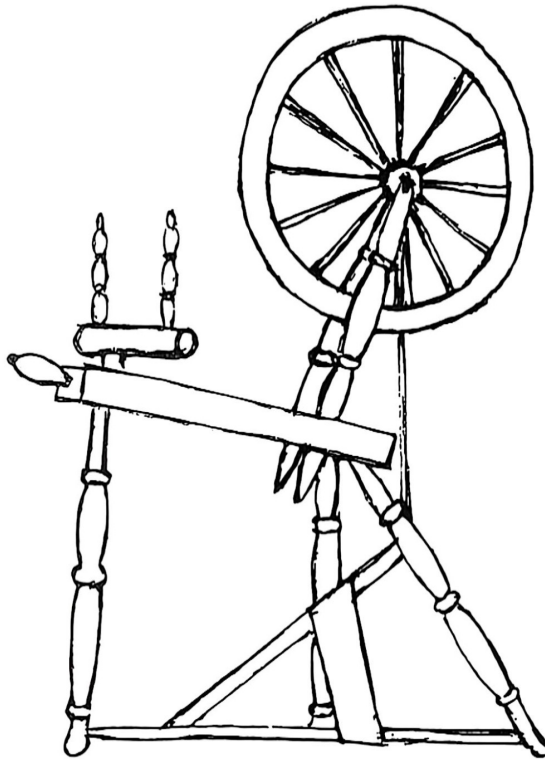
Suddenly, I heard a dog bark in the distance. High overhead in the cottony sky the engine of an airplane reverberated. My thoughts scattered, and I arose to leave. Obviously, this place wasn't haunted by the spirits of long ago. Better to try the steps by the cellar hole again.

A fast walk down the slope to the swollen brook, sloshing over the innundated stone bridge and striding up the ridge, brought me to the cellar with its four old maples and to the granite steps where I had had my dream. Again, I sat on the top step, my jacket pulled under me against the dampness of the stone, and waited patiently, not moving for half an hour. Nothing happened, except I began to feel a little ill. My throat was sore again and my eyes had a dull ache behind them.

I checked my watch. Only eleven o'clock. There was still time before lunch to go down to Nightingale Brook and examine the stone foundations of Obadiah's spinning wheel manufactory. John had told me that Obadiah probably had an undershot wheel in the water where his shop spanned the brook. The water wheel would turn his lathe for making parts to the spinning wheels. I wanted to try to picture the mill and the shop.

Picking my way over last year's sodden leaves and broken branches on the path that led down to Botham Hole (a name we had coined for the small pond that fed the narrow stone-lined raceway), I approached the rocky abutments that lay on both sides of the brook. I started to move closer to the bank when I noticed my boot lace was dragging in the mud. When I leaned over to tie it, the blood rushed to my head, and I heard a roaring like a freight train coming at me. Everything darkened. I felt a dizziness and thought I would keel over. With an effort I raised my head, and my eyes began to clear.

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There in front of me was the familiar wooden building with its cedar-shingled roof. The water wheel was turning at a rapid rate with the full bore of the spring freshet. The pond was so full that it overflowed the banks and spilled over the dam. This season would be a good one for Father. With my help he could probably make a dozen spinning wheels before the dry spells of summer.

"Oh pshaw! Now I have done it!" Father's voice came from inside the mill. I heard the sound of a bench scraping the floor and the thud of hobnailed boots.

"Father, do not fret. I am coming to help you," I called out.

When I entered the shadowy shop, Father was stamping something on the floor. There was a strong waxy and singed smell, and I knew right away what had happened. He had knocked over a candle and was putting out the flame. The danger of fire was always in our minds, what with all the shavings on the floor. There were wheel rims, spindles, and spokes piled on the long table in the middle of the room. Stacks of red oak and maple blanks stood in a corner. In another corner were two spinning wheels, finished ex-

cept for their distaffs. The place was a mess, with tools cluttered everywhere, and the lids to the lead pots of glue and linseed oil nowhere in sight.

"I had to use a candle today, Rhoby." He looked up at the small-paned window under the eaves, which let in a murky gray light. "I cannot see to do my work properly, and there is so much to be done while the water is high."

"Do not fret, Father," I said again. "I will put everything to rights."

He sighed with relief, put the candle back in its pewter holder, and lit it with a coal from the little forge. Then he sat down on the bench, clamped a maple blank in the headstock and tailstock of the lathe, slid the leather belt onto the pulley on the countershaft with a forked stick, and started the rotation of the lathe. He selected a turning gouge and placed it on the steady rest. Skillfully, he shaped the wood into the round form of a wheel post.

"This wheel is for Asa Dennis's daughter. For a wedding gift." He spoke half to himself.

Meanwhile, I collected the files and chisels, the tapers and molding planes, the mandrils, hammers, and handsaws from off the floor and table and arranged them neatly in their places between nails on the wall. The duckbill pliers, already in place, made me smile. Little mischief-maker Achsah had taken a chalky pebble, drawn eyes and teeth on the "bill." She liked to frighten Ziba by opening and closing the "jaws" and making quacking noises.

Peering under the table, I found the lids to the pots and fitted them on. Once, when I had first started to help as a youngster, I had tipped over the unlidded oil pot. Father did not scold me, but his stern look of disapproval was bad enough. Now my fingers were not clumsy, and I had learned what to do to assemble and glue the parts to the spinning wheel. Father told me I was very clever, that he did not know how he could ever manage without me.

Going over to the finished wheels, I ran my hand on their smooth burnished surfaces. How beautiful they were with their snowflake designs burned into the wood!

"Shall I put your stencil on the end of this wheel's table?"

"No, I thank you, Rhoby. I take satisfaction in doing that. When I stencil 'Obadiah Higinbotham' on a wheel that is my stamp of approval for the finished product."

"Why does your stencil of Higinbotham have only one 'g'? In school I always spell it with two 'g's and so do the others."

"Spelling is not that important. It don't matter to me anyway. But I am glad you are getting schooling. The part of the parish tithing that goes for school I do not mind. I had little education myself." He stopped his work and eyed me quizzically. "Speaking of school, should you not be there now?"

"I am getting too old for school. Did you know I will be thirteen next month? On May the twenty-second. Anyways, I can read and write already, and I know my numbers too. I would rather be with you. It is so peaceful here."

Father swung round to his work again. I knew he felt guilty that I was not at the Ragged Hill School studying my lessons, but I could tell he was really happy I was here helping him.

"Well, I am behind in getting out my promised wheels," he rationalized. "The Goodells want a new one. Their old one cannot be repaired any more. And Mrs. Randall says she wants to give her little granddaughter Hannah one of her own. I will be taking some to the market at Norwich soon, as usual. They sell well at a dollar there."

Since that closed the subject, we busied ourselves for a while in comfortable silence. I finished gluing the distaff parts for the Dennis wheel and started to fit the front and rear maidens to the mother-of-all when I saw that Father had stopped the lathe to inspect his work.

"Father, you said you would tell us about the war and the British and everything."

"That was a long time ago, almost twenty years."

"You mean you do not remember?"

"Hardly that. I just do not like to talk about those times." He hesitated. "But I promised, so pull up a stool and sit beside me. I will start from the beginning."

"I was born in Lancashire, England, as you know, on a farm outside of a market town called Bolton-Le-Moors. My father, Elisha, was a fustian farmer and—"

"What is a fustian farmer?"

"Fustian is a strong cotton and linen fabric. My father did hand-loom weaving for a master, as did other farmers in the area. The fustian master bought the material but paid very little. Bolton

was an important trading center for cotton goods, and merchants came there from London and Manchester on market day to buy. The money my father received paid for the rent of our small farm. Does that explain it?"

"Yes, yes. I understand. Do go on."

"As I said, we was poor even though my father worked hard. His greatest solace was in preaching the Baptist faith. He was an elder in a nearby chapel. He had a powerful delivery, full of spirit and animation." Full of spirit like you, I thought, my heart glowing with admiration. "But my mother," he continued, "was a poor drab. She was worn out at the age of thirty, with a large family to care for and little means to do it. We could afford meat only once a month.

"All us older boys was apprenticed out. I was fourteen when I went to a cabinetmaker in Manchester."

"What was Manchester like? Like Manchester here in Connecticut?"

"Ah, no. Manchester in Lancashire is a great city. It stands by a branch of the Mersey River on a broad plain circled with hills and moorland. People come for miles around because it is such a great cotton and linen center. And, Rhoby, you should see what happens there in the spring!"

"Oh, Father, tell me! Tell me the whole of it!" I clapped my hands in glee. This was the time I liked best, when I had Father all to myself, when he spoke only to me and did not have to divide his attention to the others.

Father leaned back on his bench, his hands locked behind his head, his gaze on the ceiling as if he could see the streets of Manchester pictured there. "In the last days of April," he reminisced, "small groups of carolers with violin and clarinet went door to door, singing songs because the cold winter was driven away and the merry month of May drew near. Also, at that time coaches, wagons, drays, and carts was freshly painted with new uniforms for the drivers, and new harnesses and cockades for the horses, and they was all driven down the main streets of the city in a grand procession."

"How I wish I could see all that!"

"Well, back to the story. My master was a harsh bugger, but he did teach me how to work with wood, how to make spinning wheels and simple pieces of furniture."

"You made the little chest up at the house, did you not?"

He nodded and rocked forward, elbows on his knees. "For three years I stayed with Master Greenough. Then one day I could stand his abuse no longer or being cooped up indoors, so I ran away. I wandered around for several days, walking south and westward until I crossed the border into Wales and ended up in the great town of Wrexham. There I got a job in an inn called the Cooked Goose. I was a stable boy—mucking out, oiling harnesses, pitching hay, currying the horses.

"Now comes the exciting part. One day a British soldier came to the inn recruiting men to be soldiers and go to the Colonies. You got one guinea and one crown to join up. That was a lot of money for a lad of seventeen. And the pay was to be eight pence a day, minus two pence, which was docked for your uniform and musket. You had to be over five feet four inches and not a Papist. I passed inspection and signed up. Just like that!" He snapped his fingers, pleased with his youthful daring.

"What did your uniform look like?" I asked. He chuckled at my eagerness and teased: "Let's see if I can recall. Oh yes. We wore long red coats with yellow facings on the cuffs and opening, two white belts crossed over the shoulders to carry our cartridge box, white waistcoat and white breeches, and black gaiters and black tricorn hat. We also had a canvas haversack for our rations and water bottle and a knapsack of goatskin for our spare shirt, stockings, and shoes. Quite an outfit, wasn't it?"

Suddenly, I realized something horrible and blurted: "Father! You were a *Redcoat*! You were our country's enemy!"

"Now, now, Rhoby, don't you believe that." He put his hand on my shoulder and gave me a little shake. "I never intended to stay in the army for life. It was a chance to get over to America. A free ride. You see, I had in the back of my mind to go to Rhode Island once I had made the crossing. We was supposed to have cousins over here, the Charles Higginbotham family. They had emigrated to Providence years ago."

I was relieved at his explanation. The thought of my father fighting in the British Army against our people appalled me. I was glad he had deserted. "Did you find your cousin Charles?"

"Yes, but that is ahead of the tale. Let me tell it in order."

He collected his thoughts for a moment, then began. "I was

with the Fourteenth Regiment in the light infantry. We set sail in late April on the ship *Rubicon*, a stout and seaworthy vessel. It was not so bad those six weeks crossing the Atlantic Ocean, though I was seasick for the first week. Us farm lads had little tolerance for the sea." He got up, eased his back, stretching his arms over his head, then paced the floor slowly.

"It only stormed once, but that was the most terrifying experience of my life—the wind howling, the crashing of the towering waves, the bone-chilling cold and wetness." I closed my eyes and saw the huge, threatening waves and heard the screaming gale. Father's voice brought me back to the warm safety of the room.

"The coast of Nova Scotia was our first landfall, and it looked like heaven to me. We landed at Halifax and was not encamped there for more than two months when we received orders sent by General Gage in New York to sail down to Boston where the colonists was rebelling against the king and the Acts of Parliament." He stopped his pacing, hands on hips, and stared into space, remembering.

"We docked in Boston at Long Wharf on the twelfth of September of seventeen sixty-eight and embarked with drums beating and flags flying. But as we marched up King Street some of the townspeople growled and shook their fists at us. Most of them was silent, though, watching us with grim faces. A few tykes threw stones at us until their mothers stopped them. We was definitely not welcome!"

The quiet telling of the story came to an abrupt halt when the door of the shop was flung open, bringing in a gust of rain and Darius, Achsah, and sopping-wet old Cyrus. The children headed for the glowing forge and spread their hands to its warmth. Their clothes were soaked from the mile-long walk from school. Cyrus immediately padded over to me, shook his reeking fur, and shoved his nose into my lap to be patted. Achsah was crying, her eyes and mouth screwed up around her sharp little nose in a most unattractive manner.

"Dora and Lucinda called me 'Little Inkybottom!'" she wailed.

Father snorted: "That don't mean nothing! I have been called everything under the sun—Jenkinbottom, Heckingbotham, and Inkinbottom. But here is a lesson for you. Most of the Higgin *bottoms*

come from Yorkshire and the Higgin*bothams* from Lancashire, my old home. The name means 'the valley of the rowan or ash tree.' Botham or bottom is the hollow where the trees grow. Hickin or higin is a Lancashire word for mountain ash. Some people say our name means fenced valley." He brushed his hand across Achsah's tear-stained face. "You should be proud of your name. Don't be hurt by their jibes."

Achsah rubbed the wetness from her cheeks. "I am crying because I am so angry! I will get that Lucinda and Dora this afternoon and pinch them good!" We all laughed at her fierceness and knew she would keep her word.

"Darius, Father was telling me about how he came to America. He really did not like being in the British Army. He wanted to be an American."

"A lot of the Welsh felt the same way," Father added. "Some of the Hessians, too. They liked the look of this country and decided to desert and settle here."

"Oh, do go on, Father! I will tell Darius of the beginning part later." Father sat down on his bench, and we gathered at his feet, sitting cross-legged on the floor.

"The troops was quartered in the Town House and in Faneuil Hall. In Boston. Our duties was simple. Stand guard now and then. Be on hand for roll call and drills and generally keep the peace."

"Were the people in Boston mean to you?" Achsah asked.

"Some of them would shout insults at us when we passed on the street going to our posts from the main guard. The youngsters was the worst, throwing snowballs at us in winter and mudballs in summer. But there was others treated us right proper. They gave us free rum, pies, and tarts and even offered us jobs if we would desert. Desertions did happen at a rate that worried our officers."

"One family by the name of Tuthill took a particular liking to me, because I had helped Mistress Tuthill carry her bundles home from the store. She had a comely daughter, older than me." He paused, smiling at some private memory, then sighed. "But I was determined to get down to Rhode Island. I was just waiting for a good chance to leave."

Our faces were tilted up toward Father like sunflowers turned to the sun. Achsah's eyes were opened wide in a hypnotic stare, and

Darius's mouth had dropped ajar. This was the first time we had ever heard the whole story of Father's desertion.

"My chance came on March fifth, seventeen-seventy, when some hotheads harassed the sentry in front of the custom house and the soldiers fired into the crowd, killing two citizens and wounding others. I was in the barracks when the drums beat to arms. We all poured out with bayonets fixed."

"Is that the same gun and bayonet over the fireplace?" Darius's voice was filled with awe.

"No, that musket and bayonet is the one I was issued in Cranston several years later. But let me go on. That night our regiment was ordered to remove to Castle William in Boston Harbor on the morrow. I knew it would be hard to desert from there, so I made up my mind to leave that night." He surveyed our spellbound faces, his own eyes fired up with the telling. Though we heard a voice outside, calling us to dinner, we ignored it as Father carried on.

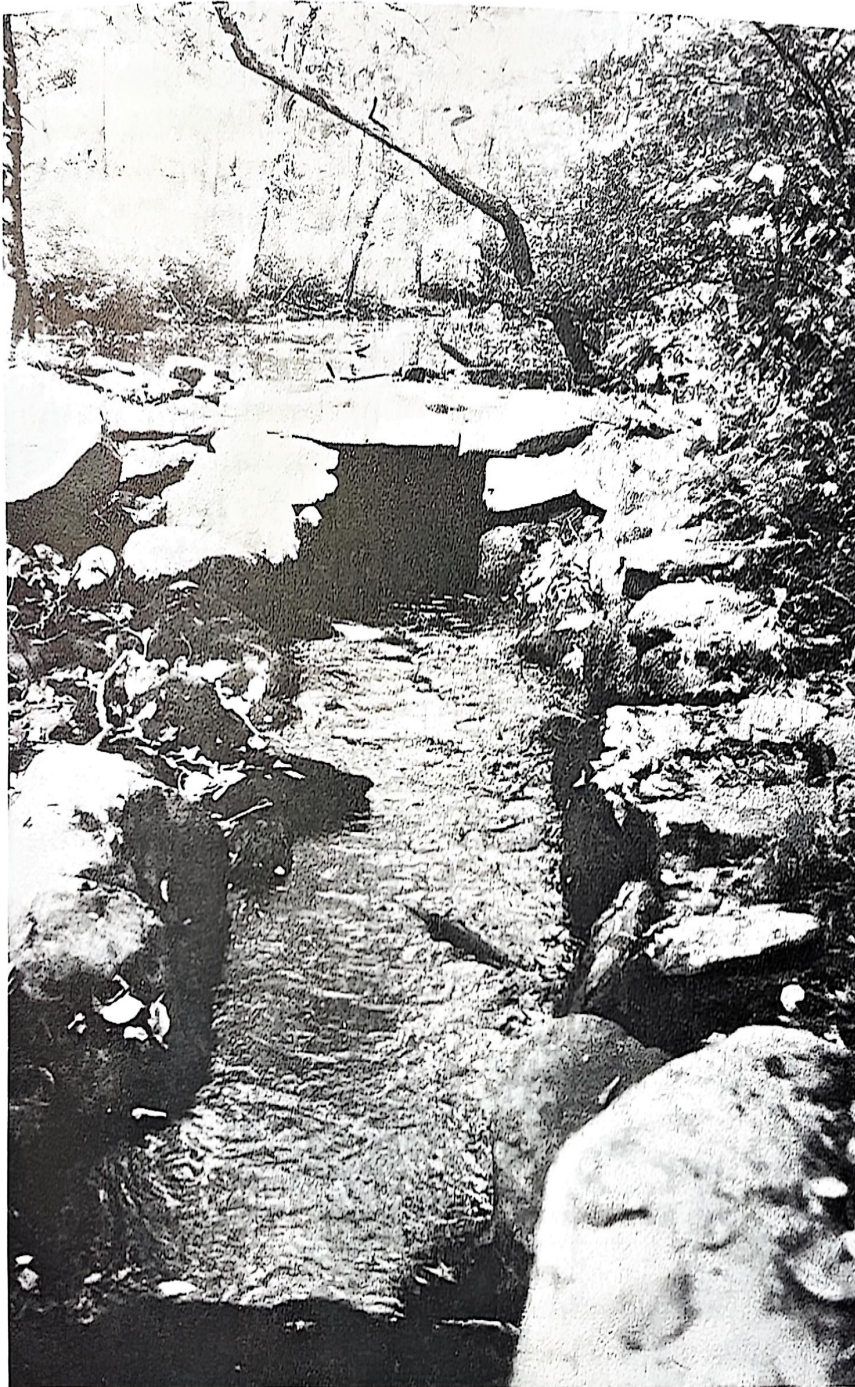
"It was a moonless night, very cold and windy. Everyone was indoors round the fires and drinking tankards of hot buttered rum. With no one paying any attention, I slipped outside and sneaked off to the Tuthills' house. They gave me some homespun clothes to wear and a napkin of bread and cheese. Then I walked all the way to Providence, sleeping during the day in haystacks and barns and at night following the highway. I was worried that a detachment would be sent out to find me, but none came. I guess there was too many desertions to keep up with."

"And then you met Mother," Achsah stated matter-of-factly.

"No, not right away. My cousin Dr. Charles Higginbotham—yes, I was able to find him—hid me for a week to be sure of my safety. Then the Cranston Town Council voted to allow me to stay, but I asked them to keep my name off the record so I could not be traced."

"What were those Higginbothams like and were they glad to see you?" I wondered if someone who had been a Redcoat would be welcome.

"Yes, the colonists encouraged desertions from the British Army, and the Higginbothams, in spite of the privations of that time, was well able to feed another mouth. The old doctor,



Higginbotham mill pond and sluiceway.

Charles's father, had died and left a goodly estate. His widow, Mercy Higginbotham, showed me his cane and hat, which she kept by the front door. He had a large library of books, too. And slaves—a Negro man and a mulatto woman with a boy and girl."

The door opened gently and Phebe entered. "Mother says you are to come right now or the dinner will get cold." She darted a look at our cosy circle. "Have I missed something? What were you talking about?"

Father got up and took Phebe's hand. "Rhoby will tell you. But to finish up, Charles found work for me at the nearby Randall farm, herding the sheep, mending the furniture, and doing odd jobs. That was my first day of work when I met your mother." He ushered us to the door with a wave of his hand. "Now we must not keep your mother, the old stocking mender, waiting."

The earthenware plates and mugs of cider had already been set out on the large table by Phebe. She hastened to get the case of knives and forks and lay them out. Mother brought the pork roast from the tin kitchen and put it in the middle of the table, while I carried the basins of boiled carrots, potatoes, and turnips. Achsah managed to transfer the batter pudding from the kettle to the board without dropping it.

When we were all seated around the table, Ziba in Mother's lap, and everyone was silently chewing their food, I figured it was a good time to hear more about my parents' early life.

"Mother, when you were married did you have a fine wedding like—"

"Nothing more likely!" she snickered and glanced at Father. "We was poor, Rhobadiah, living in an old hen house made over on a piece of Randalls' property in the Knightsville section of Cranston. We had a dirt floor and old sacking over the window openings."

"Now, Dorcas, you knew I was saving what Mr. Randall gave me, plus my army pay, so we could own a place of our own sometime."

Mother shrugged her shoulders. "Anyway, we did have a respectable civil service by the justice of the peace, and Mrs. Randall gave me that beautiful chest of drawers." We all gazed at her prized possession standing next the wall opposite the chimney, with the

row of plates, chargers, and teapot of pewter and the blue china cups and saucers displayed on it.

"Tell us how you got that gun." Darius pointed to the Brown Bess and bayonet over the fireplace. He was always eager to hear about the war and fighting.

Father stopped chewing for a moment, his cheek bulging with a mouthful of meat, and replied: "Every able-bodied man was supposed to have a musket, balls, powder, and bayonet. I did not have one nor the money to buy one. Like several other men in the upper part of town. So the Cranston Town Council ordered John King to buy equipment for me and the others. The bill was sent to the Committee of Safety. We got our guns in March of seventy-seven."

"Did you shoot the gun? Did you fight the Redcoats?" Ziba wanted to know.

"No, Ziba, I did not fire a shot on either side. The Town Council was hiring men for General Sullivan's army to go against the British at Newport, but I was not about to sign on. If I had been caught by the British I would have been hung as a deserter."

"You could have been shot as an American militiaman too and left me to raise the children. That was when little Obadiah was sick and dying. It was no more than right you refused to be enlisted. We did not have the money to pay for a substitute, either."

"It is good for you children to hear all this." Father's expression was stern. "Your mother and I had it hard in those days. The worst blow was when we learned that General Sullivan had lifted the siege at Newport and the American Army was retreating. That was after the terrible storm on August eleventh in seventy-eight when the French fleet that was protecting the colony by sea sailed off to Boston for repairs. Everyone was in a panic. Many families packed up their belongings and fled inland. Mr. and Mrs. Randall with young Jonathan and their little grandson George and their slaves had already gone to Pomfret. They left me to watch over their sheep. Dorcas kept an eye on the big house."

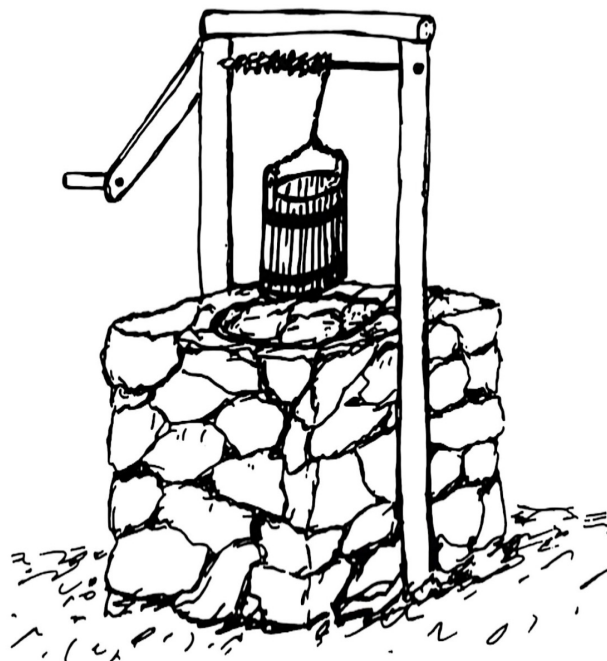
"But the British was too close for comfort, so we decided to move inland also, to Connecticut where the Randalls was." Mother took up the story, talking as she poured a cup of tea for herself and Father and cut off a plaited string of dried apples hanging from the

rafters and passed them around. We sliced the apples and put them on our pudding, then dribbled molasses over it.

"We filled the oxcart with what little we had and left Cranston on the morning of September fourteenth. Elisha was six then and, Rhobadiah, you was only a babe in arms, three and a half months old. The first night we camped out at John Brown's farm at Chepachet. Luckily, the weather was comfortable. All day the sun was out and only a few clouds high in the sky. The next night we made it almost to the Great Falls on the Quinebaug River near Cargill's mills."

"Mother forgot to tell you I was driving the Randalls' flock of sheep," Father interposed. "That slowed us down considerable. But on the third day I drove them across the river on Sabin's rickety bridge, and in an hour we arrived at Pomfret Street. Young Jonathan met us there and guided us to the Randall farm. That fall on October fifth I bought the ten-acre tract by Nightingale Brook from John Trowbridge for one hundred pounds lawful money. The first winter we stayed with the Randalls while I built the cottage. And now here we all are!"

With the tale told and the noon meal finished, we each went about our separate chores: Darius to sharpen knives on the grindstone in the backyard, Father to graft some apple trees, Mother to clear away the dishes, and the girls to scramble off to school. I had the task of taking the oaken bucket to the well for



water to wash the dishes. I hooked the rope of the windlass to the handle and lowered the bucket into the narrow stone-lined well.

As Rhobadiah wound the windlass up and hoisted the heavy bucket over the rim of the well, she bumped it against the side and spilled some of the icy water on her foot.

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The first thing I was conscious of was the musty smell of leaf humus, which wasn't surprising because I lay face down on the wet ground. Then I became aware of water dripping into my boots. Rolling over, I sat up and discovered I had tripped over a root under a big hemlock. Its drooping branches collected the mist into droplets that splashed onto me with a steady rhythm.

A blue jay flew by, protesting my presence with raucous cries. I sighed, tied my errant bootlace, and struggled to my feet. My watch showed twelve noon.

The shop and water wheel won't be there. Obadiah won't be working on his spinning wheels, I reminded myself before I turned to stare at the crumbling, brush-crowded foundations on either side of the brook. My eyes wandered up the wooded slope to where the house used to be. All that had been cleared land with the fields marked by the stone fences. Nature had long ago claimed its own, even to the human dust. With the mood of the dream, or whatever it was, still upon me, I found it difficult to grasp the time span. That was almost two hundred years ago, and yet there seemed to be only a thin veil between then and now.

Back at the house, I didn't tell John until one evening several days later when I was in the kitchen peeling potatoes for dinner.

"John, I had another of those—episodes." His eyebrows raised but he merely said: "Oh? and . . ." Briefly, I told him the highlights.

"Cathy, you know what? I think you're making this all up. You have little to go on of the history of those people, so you use your very vivid imagination."

I dropped the potatoes into a pot of water and set it on the stove to boil. John was rummaging in the fridge in search of something to munch on. I wondered whether I ought to reveal what I had found while researching in the Cranston Town Hall the day before. Absently, I said: "Don't touch those hors d'oeuvres. They're

for the company tonight.” Then, quietly: “Yesterday in the Cranston Council book on February nineteenth in seventeen seventy-six, I came upon an entry—wait a minute. Let me get my notes.”

I went to the desk and got my notebook, flipped the pages, and read: “ ‘The Council was called to inspect and find out how many men there is in this town that is obliged by law to have firearms and not able to purchase the same.’ Obadiah was listed among those. There! What do you make of that!” I exclaimed with triumph.

“And listen to this! On August seventh of seventy-eight, the Council judged that Obadiah Higginbotham was ‘not of the ability to bear the expense of hiring a man to do duty in his room.’ His room meant his place. I didn’t know all this for a fact until yesterday, but the Council records corroborate my dream experience.”

John gaped at me with an odd look in his eyes, then came over and felt my forehead in the time-honored test for a fever.

“Oh, silly! I feel okay, except for this lousy cold, which doesn’t seem to clear up in spite of doctoring. But do me a favor. Don’t mention what I told you to our guests tonight. They’ll think I’m crazy.”

“Believe me, I won’t!” John promised with fervor and gave me a squeeze around the shoulders. “It sure is weird though.”

What bothered me more than my physical health was my mental state. I kept getting flashes of the faces of my dream family, and their voices echoed in my mind. That was when I decided to make an appointment with a psychiatrist. Everyone knows that “hearing voices” is a sign of mental derangement!

The doctor prescribed Valium, which seemed to help, or else it was the weeklong visit of our daughter Dorothy and her two lively youngsters, Todd and Becky, that drove all visions and voices from my head. They had come up from New York City where they lived in a posh apartment opposite Central Park. Her husband, Bill Griswold, had a well-paying job with a public relations firm in Manhattan.

Even though I remarked to John that all was fine with me, he watched me closely for two weeks when he thought I wasn’t aware. When I called it to his attention one Sunday morning, he pretended to laugh the idea off.

"Don't worry," I assured him. "I've been back to the graveyard and the cellar holes twice and nothing has happened."

"Whew! That's good to know. I guess those trances or whatever were just an aberration. Due to the position of the stars, the pull of the moon, the—where are you going?" He saw me putting on my best winter coat and wool gloves. It was a very cold day for April.

"To church. In Abington. I've always wanted to go to a service there. Did you know it's the oldest one in Connecticut that has been in constant use? Built in seventeen fifty-one." I hesitated a moment. "Would you care to join me?" John declined with a deprecatory smile, saying that I would have to represent the family, that he had some paper work to catch up on.

Secretly, I was glad to be going alone because I had a plan. I wanted to walk from the Higginbotham "homes" to the church to see how it must have been in the old days for them.

Parking the car on the county road near the modern highway bridge over the Mashamoquet (Nightingale Brook became Mashamoquet River at this point) just where the mossy lane to the Higginbotham's land joined the road, I got out and started my fantasy journey.

It was a brittlely cold day with a low cloud ceiling and occasional sprinkles of snowflakes. The only sound on the lonely road was that of my hard-heeled shoes. The woods on either side were thick with dark hemlocks, white birch, and shiny laurel. Tatters of pale leaves left over from winter clung to the beech trees, but the swamp maples glowed with rosy buds that foretold spring. No street lights or billboards marred the landscape. No cars passed me, so that I had a sense of long ago.

Having driven fast over this road many times, it seemed I progressed very slowly up and down the grades, but I plodded along enjoying the solitude. Once two kingfishers darted in front of me, squabbling, then veered off. When I came out on the Windham road, the old highway to Woodstock, the woods gave way to cleared fields bounded by the ever-present stone walls.

Another hill to climb, then down to Abington center with its few old houses and grocery store, across the old Providence Turnpike, and up the incline to the church. The two-and-one-half mile trek had taken fifty minutes.

ancient mother up onto her two canes, and Benjamin Dana, who was putting away his big bass viol. The Cunningham girls, Betsey and Lucy, and Elizabeth Hicks were grouped around him, no doubt admiring his new instrument but also probably passing along the latest gossip.

"It is freezing in here!" Phebe hugged her wool cloak around her. "Are you not thankful that Parson Lyon is kind enough not to hold an afternoon service this day? When the windows have frost on the *inside*, that is cold! And look, Rhoby. You can see your breath." She blew out a white puff of air.

"You should have worn your woolen stockings under your worsted petticoat and not those cotton ones. I am warm enough, except for my nose." I stood up and opened the little door to the high square pew when Lucy, Betsey, and Elizabeth rushed down the aisle toward me.

"Did you notice Sara Gilbert in her beautiful gray silk gown?" Betsey said breathlessly. "She made the material from their own silkworms. Spun, weaved, and sewed it."

"I am glad we do not keep silkworms," Phebe said without envy. "They are so messy and hungry all the time. Gladys Ingalls says she gets tired of picking mulberry leaves every day to feed the nasty little things."

Betsey stuck her nose in the air. "I guess silk is for fine folk anyway." Then she quickly changed the subject. "But did not Matthew look the fine fellow in the new straight trousers fashion?" The Gilberts, married just a week, had stood up during the service, as was the custom, and slowly turned around so that everyone could admire their wedding outfits.

"Is someone courting you yet, Rhoba? You are the same age as Sara, sixteen." Lucy sniggered and whispered something in her sister's ear. Then they both laughed. I knew what they were thinking, that I was a plain Jane and would be hard put to find a suitor. Their use of my right name, Rhoba, instead of the childish pet name of Rhoby gratified me, however.

"Perhaps the schoolmaster will call on you some evening. You were his star pupil."

"Master Willard Hubbard?" I raised my eyebrows in surprise. "I think not. He has been seen walking with Emily Trowbridge."

Anyway, I would rather stay home with my mother and father. They need me."

Elizabeth, my trusted friend, ten years older than me and a confirmed spinster, came to my defense. "Rhoba will make some young man an excellent wife! She is the best weaver and spinner in the parish. She can make up nine skeins in a day. I would like to see you equal that!"

Lucy pouted. "Well, I did not mean—"

"And Rhoba is well known for her skill at cooking," Elizabeth went on. "Handsome is as handsome does, Lucy Cunningham. You cannot tell a book by its cover." I had the feeling that Elizabeth was talking somewhat about herself, for her face was heavily pock-marked and her teeth were very bad. She rarely smiled for that reason, or if she did, she covered her mouth with her hand. But she was a good soul, generous and loyal.

"I am going to put the Bible under my pillow with a crooked sixpence placed on chapter one of Ruth," eleven-year-old Phebe offered innocently. "Father says it is an old Lancashire custom. If you do it, you dream of your future husband. The sixpence has to be on the sixteenth verse, the one where Ruth says: 'Whither thou goest I will go. Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God.' Is that not lovely?" Phebe was such a dear, sweet child.

"I am afraid you would have a sleepless night. Our Bible is very big," I said, and hugged her. "Come on, little dreamer. Let us join the others."

Father and Mother were standing in the south entryway with their backs to us, conversing with Mr. Lyon, who looked a bit comical with a black silk handkerchief wrapped around his bald head to ward off the chill. I liked our parson even though Father and his Baptist friends railed against trained ministers and said they were ungodly because they were too far removed from primitive times. I believe that meant they thought graduates of Yale, like Mr. Lyon, or of Harvard were too high and mighty in their manner, not democratic enough like the working-class Baptist preachers, who were untrained.

It was true that Walter Lyon was very much the aristocrat, correct and precise in his deportment. When he visited our little Ragged Hill School to catechize the children, he always took up a

position in the corner of the room near the fireplace and asked his questions in a clipped manner of speaking. The dozen or so of us students sat on the hard benches next to the walls with hands folded in our laps.

I could picture the preacher in his well-worn black broadcloth suit, picking up with his long white fingers each book from the teacher's desk: *Murray's Grammar*, *Welch's Arithmetic*, *Dwight's Geography* and *Webster's Spelling Book*. And the Bible, of course. The scholar being quizzed had to stand in the middle of the room to answer the questions. Mr. Lyon listened to us solemnly and even prompted us occasionally. He gave prizes of colored ribbons to those who performed well. I had received one every time, a total of fifteen, which I braided into bookmarks.

The Abington Society members were very pleased to have Mr. Lyon accept their call after their first pastor, the Reverend David Ripley, had passed away following a lengthy illness. They held a lively ordination dinner in Samuel Sumner's tavern for Pastor Lyon in 1785. Even though I was only seven at the time, I remember Mother talking about it. She and Father had not attended, feeling out of place at such an occasion for they did not approve of the copious drinking at those affairs. Mrs. Hicks had shocked them with the story of one ordination dinner where thirty bowls of punch and ten bottles of wine were consumed *before* dinner and forty-four bowls of punch and eighteen bottles of wine *during* dinner.

As Phebe and I approached our parents, I heard Father exhorting the parson. "If you do not understand the Baptist doctrine, you would do well to read *Help to Zion's Travelers*. It shows that we Baptists believe in regeneration through the agency of the Holy Spirit. We take the Bible as God's divine inspired words. The Bible gives us the rules for both faith and practice."

He paused to glance at Mr. Dana, the young Cunningham girls, and the Goodells, who were edging past us toward the door, their faces alert with interest. Every word overheard would be repeated, no doubt, at their noon meals. Reluctantly, one by one, they bowed to the minister and went out the door.

"As I was saying, the book is by Robert Hall, and he removes the stumbling blocks to belief."

Parson Lyon did not respond, just slipped his gloveless hands inside the full sleeves of his black robe and prepared to listen patiently, although he had heard the harangue many times before from the Baptists. He was well aware of the six principles they believed in: the laying on of hands, adult baptism, repentance, universal redemption, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. He was known to speak scornfully of the Baptist preachers. "Men of the shop, street, and field, uneducated and lacking in culture," he would say.

"There has to be the separation of church and state," Father argued hotly. "All we dissenters want is freedom of religion, the liberty to follow our own consciences. A true society is the voluntary association of believers, each congregation having the right of self-government under the Headship of Christ."

The parson jabbed his forefinger at Father. "The Toleration Act of seventeen eighty-four passed by the General Assembly freed all nonconformists from tithing and attendance in their parish churches, Obadiah. First, however, you must have a bona fide certificate asking for dismissal."

"And so I have!" Father drew a paper from his pocket and waved it under Mr. Lyon's nose. "I had a hard time obtaining a hearing before the Council, but I finally got one. This will be my last attendance in this meetinghouse."

"Well then, Higginbotham," My Lyon sniffed, "there is no need for you to try to convince me of your so-called rights."

He clamped his mouth shut. It was obvious he was getting riled up. Once I had overheard him talking to his wife about the Baptists, complaining that they were all alike, a discontented lot who opposed the Standing Order and were always agitating for one reform or another. His wife added that the itinerant preachers were coarse and noisy and of doubtful morality. I was glad to hear him say, although with reluctance, that Father was a decent fellow, for all his strong opinions, and that he was hardworking, high-principled, and a man who minded his own business for the most part.

"Tell me, Obadiah, how did you conclude to become a Baptist rather than, say, a Methodist or Episcopalian?"

I could see that Father was on the verge of blurting out on a subject he had often held forth on, that he did not like the haughti-

ness of college graduates with their erudite sermons, that he preferred plain-spoken Baptist men like Deacon Jesse Bolles. But then he must have recalled the visit here of the eminent Baptist, the Reverend James Manning of Providence, on May second of 1779 and how it had influenced him.

"I liked what Reverend Manning had to say when he preached at Paul Tew's in Woodstock fifteen years ago."

"Ah, yes. The president of the Baptist college in Providence, now called Brown University."

"And on his way back from Philadelphia in September, he stopped in Woodstock again," Mother chimed in. The family had gathered in a tight circle around Father, wishing the confrontation was over yet not willing to desert him. We always stuck together when there was trouble.

"That time Mr. Manning preached at Elder Ledoyt's meeting on Sunday afternoon. The audience was solemn and greatly affected."

Mother was always loyal to Father in public, but I knew when we got home she would belabor him about leaving the Abington Society. She had had her ear bent by members who made it a point to tell her that money for Parson Lyon's salary would be more difficult to raise with fewer parishioners paying tithes. Already our neighbors Elisha Chase and Israel Hicks had received their certificates and removed to Baptist societies in Hampton and Ashford. Mother worried also that any hard feelings might result in less customers for Higginbotham spinning wheels.

"Not likely," Father had answered only a few days ago. "Religion and business should not mix. I tell you, I am ill at ease in the Abington Meetinghouse. I wish to be with humble folk like myself."

"Humble? You?!" I could hear Mother spitting out the words. "You have been a dissenter from the day you was born! No one could ever call you meek and mild!" Father put his arm around her waist and called her "Dory," a pet name he seldom used, only when he wanted to calm her down or have his way with her.

"Now, Dory, we need not discuss this further. It has all been settled. Come, let us have a quiet time together." He led her grumbling into the bedchamber and shut the door.

Perhaps now that Father had shown his certificate to Parson Lyon, Mother would be resigned. I hoped so. I did not like fights and arguments.

At the mention of Elder Ledoyt, Mr. Lyon's face lit up as if he had been given an unexpected gift. "Ah, yes, the Reverend Biel Ledoyt. He organized the first Baptist Society in Woodstock in seventeen sixty-six, if my memory serves me." My parents nodded their heads, a blank expression on their faces, wondering why the minister looked so triumphant.

"And, if I remember correctly, there were many discordant and insubordinate elements in the society, which created a great fire of contention, many council meetings, many disputes." His smile of smug superiority brought a frown to Father's brow.

"If I am not mistaken," the minister went on, "a number of members withdrew and set themselves up in an adjoining town and called themselves the true faith. Now would that have been the Second Baptist or Quasset Church that Jesse Bolles organized in seventeen ninety-two and to which you presently belong?"

Before Father could respond, Mother, who had been simmering in the background, shifting from one foot to the other, burst out: "It was a shame and a disgrace the way Elder Ledoyt was treated! Did you know that some ruffians tried to waylay him to do him harm when he traveled on the road to Woodstock? Three times they tried, but he was smart. Each time he took a different route. Mr. Lyon, I do not hold with violence no matter what a person believes!"

Putting his hand on Mother's shoulder in a gesture of sympathy, the minister intoned gravely: "Mrs. Higginbotham, I assure you I am of the same opinion. No wonder Elder Ledoyt removed his family to New Hampshire. Unfortunately though, he left his flock in a very broken and divided condition." He gave a gusty sigh and rolled his eyes heavenward in a silent prayer for the poor, misguided souls of the Baptist faith.

"Do not forget," Father countered, "Samuel Webster, the evangelist mulatto, has made many converts this year. It is a zealous time for us."

Mr. Lyon began to inch toward the door, mindful of his dinner waiting on the table at his house next door. Achsah and Phebe had

slumped into a pew and were giggling and whispering to each other. Ziba leaned against the pew and rhythmically kicked the side of it in a desultory way. When I put my finger to my lips to shush him, he mouthed the words: "Can we go now?"

But Father still would not leave off. He had to say his piece about another matter that perturbed him greatly. "What can be done about that ungodly man in the Pomfret pulpit," he exploded. "His wild drinking parties and dances for the young people are undermining their morals and influencing our young ones, too."

"You mean the Reverend Walter Dodge, the Harvard graduate?"

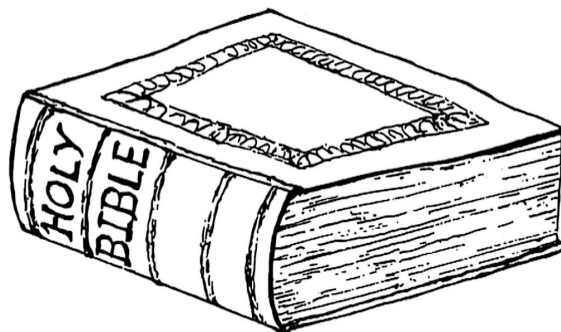
The parson heaved a sigh. We knew he did not condone such goings-on and had deplored the division in the Pomfret Congregational Society. He had made that the subject of his sermon last week.

"Mr. Dodge is an eloquent speaker," he conceded, "but I agree he is leading the young people far from the Puritan circle. What can be done with the Dodgeites and their so-called Reformed Catholic Church I do not know, but I am certain that the scales will fall from their eyes soon and they will see that imposter in his true light."

Suddenly, with this final word, the meetinghouse brightened. Through the windows I could see blue sky with scarves of thin mist trailing across it. Mr. Lyon flung open the door to usher us out. The sunlight blinded me for a moment.

Annoyed at Ziba, who tugged at her sleeve, pestering her to take him home, Rhobadiah spoke sharply: "Stop that, Ziba! I will go when I am good and ready!"

.....



"I'm sorry. What did you say?" The matronly gray-haired woman sitting next to me tapped my arm. "I apologize for disturbing you, but I saw you had dozed off and the service is over now."

"Oh, excuse me! I'm the one who should apologize. How embarrassing! I'm afraid sermons often have this effect on me."

She introduced herself as Mrs. Evan Kaczynski, I gave her my name, we exchanged a few pleasantries about the old church, then I made a quick exit.

As I hastened down the hill on the Windham road, the realization hit me that I didn't need the quiet and solitude of the woods at the Higginbotham site to bring on a trance, nor was this one preceded by dizziness or palpitations. I had slipped into the past more easily than before. What it all meant I couldn't begin to figure out. One resolution I made, however, was not to breathe a word to John about this latest episode. Another resolve was to search the church records as soon as possible.

My husband is the smartest man in the world, in my biased opinion. He knows a little about everything and a lot about some things. His powers of perception, of putting two and two together, never cease to amaze me. So it shouldn't have taken me by surprise when the following Thursday, while we were washing and drying the dinner dishes, he opened a conversation that made me very wary.

"I met a sweet little old lady in the drugstore today. A Mrs. Kaczynski."

"Oh? That was nice." Play it cool. Change the subject. "John, please don't take a dish I've just washed. Take one that's dripped awhile. That way your towel doesn't get as damp."

"Yes, Mother," he teased, and continued. "She said she was glad to have met you in church and hoped to see you there again on Sunday." He laid the towel down, folded his arms, and contemplated me with a stern expression. "Then you know what she said?"

"No, of course not."

"She said *you* said when she nudged you because you were dozing: 'Stop that, Ziba. I'll go when I'm good and ready.'"

I raised my eyebrows in an innocent "so what?" look, but it did no good.

"Cathy, it's happened again, hasn't it? In spite of the doctor's

prescriptions, the talk with the psychiatrist, and all the rest."

I nodded, feeling guilt for no reason. "But it's not my fault. I can't help it. I don't bring on those—occurrences intentionally," I exclaimed.

This was when John pushed me into a chair and lectured me, saying I had to lay off the research, that interesting as the results were, heaven knows where they would lead, that I might somehow be harmed, and so on. Personally, I think he was getting tired of the subject of the Higginbothams and feeling a bit left out, too. I had stepped into a life he couldn't share.

"Do I have your promise to quit this searching and take it easy?"

I nodded again, solemn-faced. This seemed to satisfy John. He patted my head, a gesture of parental approval. The evening ended with our watching a ball game on television, a prosaic twentieth-century pastime.

The last thought I had before falling asleep that night was being glad I hadn't shown John the copy of Obadiah's request for dismissal from the Abington Congregational Church, dated January 6, 1794. I had ferreted it out from the State Archives the day before. It read:

This certifies that I, the subscriber, differing in sentiment, worship & ministry from the 2nd Ecclesiastical Society in Pomfret established by Law within certain limits & local bounds & have joined to the 2nd Baptist Society in Woodstock.

Signed: Lemuel Ingals, Society Clerk
in the 2nd Society in Pomfret
Obadiah Higginbotham

I hadn't promised John not to continue my research, just "to take it easy." But in any case, April passed into May and May into June without any unusual incident or repeat of the dream-life. Peace reigned in our household, mainly because I had a new project to engross me, the fixing up of our bedroom.

Redoing of our large upstairs bedroom facing the road had been saved to the last. This would complete the restoration of George and Pattey Randalls' old house. I wanted to make the decorating as authentic as possible, the way I imagined it might have been. The peeling off of the non-descript tan wallpaper had

revealed another paper underneath of garish scenes of blue cottages and carriages and hoop-skirted ladies. Under that wallpaper, next to the plaster, appeared a paper with a pale yellow background with white stripes and tiny white roses in between the stripes.

I sent a sample of the yellow paper to a company that specialized in period wall coverings to find out the origin of the paper. The reply came in early June, stating that the paper was probably made in France around the turn of the nineteenth century. To my delight, I was able to find a similar paper, an authentic French reproduction, although this one had leafy vines connecting the floral design.

One morning in late June, after covering our “cannonball” bed, bureau, and dressing table with sheets, I attacked the laborious job of scraping the three layers of old paper off the plaster. Although the sun had been up for only a couple of hours, it shone in the open east window with a vengeance. The air was heavy and still. Even the phoebes, calling from the spruce trees on the front lawn, seemed to be complaining of the heat and mugginess.

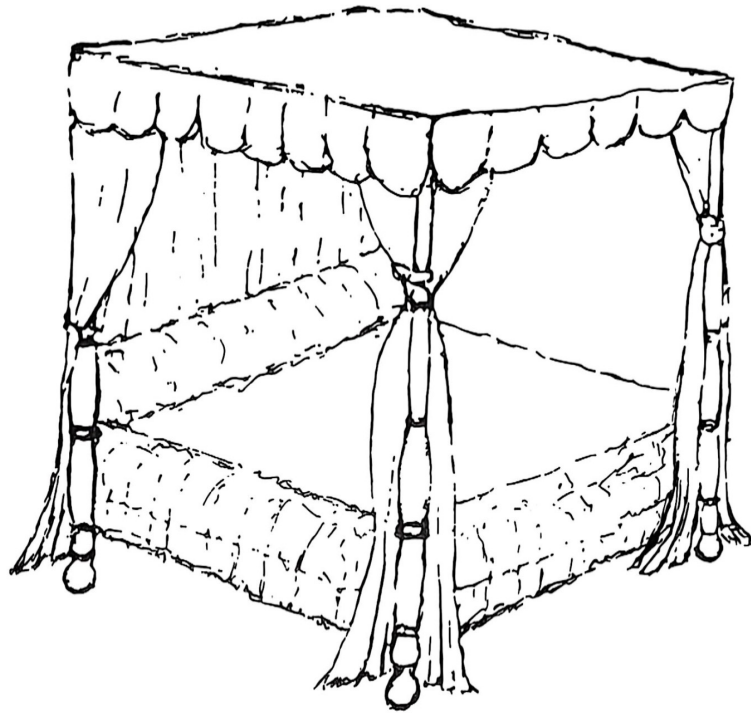
For about an hour, I perched on the ladder, my neck arched backward, my arm stretched to scrape away the paper next to the ceiling. The humidity was unbearable. My arm and neck ached. But what bothered me the most was the inability of my body to perspire. This was a peculiarity of mine that happened now and then and, without the relief of beads of moisture on my face, like a sweating glass cooling an iced drink, my face became flushed and my head throbbed.

Climbing down from the ladder, I staggered over to the window to get a breath of air. Nothing stirred in the thick green foliage that smothered the countryside from our property eastward all the way to the next ridge. Far off I heard a truck changing gears on a steep hill. I rested my head against the window jamb and closed my eyes for a moment.

.....

Footsteps sounded behind me accompanied by the soft rustle of clothing.

“Rhoba, tell me what you think of this wallpaper. George brought it from Providence yesterday. He likes it, I like it, but what



do *you* think? I value your opinion."

I turned to smile at Pattey, thinking that although she was big with child, her second, she still looked as pretty as a china doll. Her fine silver-blond hair was arranged in the latest fashion, a long lock looped low on the back of her neck, brought up to the crown and fastened there with a tortoiseshell comb. Her cotton short gown was blue as was her striped petticoat, bringing out the blue in her gray-blue eyes. She was of smaller stature than me, with dainty white hands and little feet. When we walked together, I had to gauge my steps for her shorter legs.

"You have such a sense of color, Rhoba." She thrust the paper eagerly into my hands. "Is it not pretty? George says it was brought over from France in last month's shipment to Everett's Store. Very costly, too, but George says he does not mind. He wants this house to be as handsome and well appointed as the Grosvenor's on Pomfret Street."

"This will do just fine, Pattey." I held the sheet of yellow striped paper up against the wall and eyed it critically. "It is bright and cheerful without being too warm-looking for this chamber with its southern exposure." I handed the piece back to her with a rueful laugh. "But I am afraid you will not see the room papered for a long time yet. The workmen have not even finished plastering the walls."

The floor was littered with scraps of lath and bits of plaster. Except for the big four-poster bed and a wooden chest, the chamber was bare. Pattey looked crestfallen, so I hastened to add: "Of course, it is a comfort to have the window sash and glass in." The twelve-over-twelve panes were filmed with white dust, but at least the three windows could be closed to keep out insects.

In spite of the unfinished condition of the house, George and Pattey had decided to move down from the old Randall house on the hill into their new home more conveniently located by the road-way recently surveyed by Lemuel Ingalls and other men from Abington. The four-rod-wide road, a section of the Boston & Hartford Turnpike, was nearing completion in this summer of 1799, blessed by fair weather and many hands at work felling trees, carting rocks to the sides for fences, and blasting boulders too big to move.

Massachusetts towns had already terminated their portions through to the state line at Douglas; however, progress had slowed when the highway entered Pomfret Township because of the heavy tax that would have to be levied to pay property owners for the land needed to improve and alternate the old Post Road route known as the Middle Road. Father was one of the objectors when he heard that the Boston Turnpike Company was authorized to erect a tollgate within one mile of where the pike crossed Nightingale Brook. The site chosen was by Sam Warner's old house. Every loaded wagon would be charged twelve and a half cents, empty ones six pence, a man and a horse four coppers, and there were various other charges. How Father had complained to our good friend Reuben Spalding about the project!

"I suppose I will have to pay every time I ride to Quasset to service on the Sabbath and on the way back," he fumed.

Reuben had come to pick up a chair that Father had mended. He sat on it, testing its strength, then turned his attention to Father's fuming and fussing. Mother and I were in the midst of clearing away the supper dishes, but the matter was of such importance that we set the dishes down quietly and listened.

"And every time I take the cart to Putnam for supplies," Father went on, "it will cost me eighteen and a half cents. Well, I will shun that turnpike and go the longer way round through Abington."

Reuben regarded Father like a schoolmaster instructing a

pupil. "Obadiah, you are ignorant of the stipulations of the company's charter. When the turnpike company was incorporated in October of ninety-seven there were certain provisions." He paused, then, using his fingers, began counting off the provisions.

"People traveling to the meetinghouse, to funerals, to town meetings, to society and freemen's meetings, to military duty or training. None of these will have to pay toll. Nor will farmers like you passing through the gate on ordinary farm business. And if you live within a mile and a half of the gate, as you do, or if you are going to the mill, you will not be required to pay." He gestured with his hands, open-palmed. "So you see, your worries are unfounded."

Father grumbled, though somewhat appeased. "You was in this from the start, was you not, Reuben? You was one of the subscribers of the Memorial to the General Assembly in Hartford last year. I do not see how the new route will benefit you. The old Middle Post Road on the hill by the Randalls is good enough."

"But it is not good enough! That is precisely the trouble. The road there is rough and rocky. Even General Washington commented on that when he traveled through here years ago. And the way is too narrow to boot, only two rods wide. It is said the entire new route of one hundred and six miles from Boston to Hartford will be about twenty miles shorter than the common stage road which leads from Hartford through Springfield to Boston. The turnpike will go through a more populous part of the country and have taverns one to seven miles apart. This will be of great public benefit."

"And a private benefit to Samuel Spring and his tavern," Father retorted. "No doubt, the toddy business will thrive and we will have a lot of drunken travelers on the road." Mr. Spalding was not concerned about the publick house trade, because he was known to tipple himself upon occasion.

Abruptly, Father took another tack, the cost of the project. "How much land will they buy from you?"

"A sizable amount but not as much as from Patience Randall. I understand she will be compensated one hundred and sixty dollars, and Israel Hicks next west will get seventy-three dollars. The total damages to the town will be a considerable sum but worth every cent."

Mr. Spalding had helped survey the layout of the turnpike. Be-

sides being a surveyor, he was a town lister, a man of consequence in the community. We Higginbothams greatly respected and trusted him. Ever since I learned to read well, he had given me permission to use his well-stocked library. There were religious tracts, spiritual letters, and government treatises. These I passed over, finding more to my liking Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *The Life of James Thompson*, and Young's *Night Thoughts*. I was particularly fond of Edward Young's poems about life, death, and immortality, albeit much was difficult to understand.

I brought my woolgathering thoughts back to the job at hand, went to the corner of the room, and picked up the broom standing there. "I had better get to sweeping or it will be time for dinner before you know it."

"Oh, Rhoba, put the broom down. It is too hot to work. Come sit beside me on the bed. I did not mean for you to come here to work anyway. I really wanted you to see the wallpaper."

Pattey pulled the rumpled sheet and counterpane over the bolster and hefted herself up on the bed, then patted the place beside her. Without willing it, I saw in my mind's eye Pattey and George hugging and kissing each other in this same bed. I blushed at the unbidden picture and my heart beat faster. My childhood adulation of George had matured into a firm friendship, but nonetheless I was somewhat in awe of him and always kept him at a polite distance, afraid he would discover my former girlish emotions. Gingerly, I edged onto the soft mattress, folded my hands in my lap, and smiled at my friend. I knew her too well not to be aware that she had something on her mind she wished to talk to me about.

"Do you remember the first day we met?" she began. "I can still see you coming up the hill through the orchard. I was sitting on a bench in front of the old house, darning stockings."

"I remember that day. It was the last day of May in seventeen ninety-five, and the apple trees were still in bloom. You had arrived here from Providence a week before. George's young bride. We had not seen you yet, and we wondered what you would look like."

Pattey laughed her beautiful laugh, like a veerie's tumbling notes. "And I heard about *you* and your family and all the neighbors. And about the magnificent view of the Ragged Hills, the

green valleys, the blue ridges in the distance."

"Oh, yes!" I agreed. "And do not forget the loveliness of the view in winter when as far as you can see the whole world is white and glistening with blue shadows in the valleys and the smoke from the cottage chimneys spiraling up like little corkscrews."

"Of course, down here by the highway, there is not the view; however, there will be more hustle and bustle."

I was almost afraid to ask but too curious to hold back. "How did George describe me?"

Pattey gazed at me fondly. Being of the same age, we had become fast friends and had spent as much time together as we could spare from our chores. Aside from church picnics, hay rides, and sleigh rides and my doing the weaving in her house, we would often meet halfway between our homes at the burying yard, where we would sit on the stone steps and prattle about this and that. Jokingly, Pattey called herself an accomplished gossip. Although never malicious, she had a way of making a tidbit of news amusing. Sometimes she irked me even so, because when I excused people's shortcomings she would exclaim: "Oh, Rhoba! You never speak ill of anyone!" As if that was a fault.

One time when she had given a witty description of an old bachelor's funeral, someone she knew from Rhode Island, she became serious and stared intently at our little burying ground, empty except for the three fieldstone-marked graves. She turned to me, her eyes boring into mine, her expression sober.

"I have already told George this, but when I die will you be sure to remind him that I want to be buried here, in this lovely spot, and not in the Abington graveyard?" She took my hand and squeezed it.

"How doleful of you, Pattey!" I cried, a chill running up my spine. "Anyway, how do you know I won't go before you? You are the picture of health, while I am always catching cold and coughing my way through winter." This exchange left me with a sense of foreboding that I could not shake right away. Pattey was seldom that serious. Having expressed herself, she seemed to consider the matter settled.

Now she was frowning, her head cocked, yet her eyes were twinkling as she studied me. "It is hard to separate what you look like

from what you are. You are so gifted and conscientious, putting everyone else's needs before yours and—"

"Come on, Pattey. I asked not what *you* think but what George said."

"Well now, let's see if I can recall. He said you were very intelligent, more so than most girls. Very clever with your hands. That you were not flighty and flirtatious. Modest, not inclined to idle chatter and—"

"But how did he describe my appearance?"

"All right," Pattey said matter-of-factly. "Of average height, thin, with soft brown hair and nice hazel eyes. You *do* have lovely eyes, Rhoba, and a lovely smile with good teeth." She lapsed into silence, surveying me with an intensity that had to be a prelude to something. Had I described myself I would have said: spare body, narrow shoulders, small bosom, prominent nose with two pockmarks on the left side. How I hated those marks! The ones on my nose and the one between my eyebrows. I had suffered through the smallpox as a child. So had many others, I reminded myself, and they bear marks also. I continued my mental inventory: slightly receding chin and—

"I do wish we could find you a husband, my dear friend," Pattey said all in one breath, knowing how uncomfortable I felt about the subject. So this is what she had been leading up to! Sliding off the bed, I faced her, weariness in my voice.

"Pattey, I am twenty-one, a spinster, an old maid, and I always will be. I am not destined to marry." She leaned forward and caught my hand. "Do not say that! There are surely men who would like—"

"Oh, yes, older men, widowers. Mother has exhausted the list, and the young, unmarried men have gone west. The widowers want a housekeeper and a nursemaid for their children. Or they are blind in one eye, have warts and a gimp like me."

"I do not notice your limp, Rhoba. You always stand up so straight."

It was true that my limp was not very noticeable. Ever since the tree had fallen on my foot when I was five years old, I had learned to stand on my good leg when resting and not slump, and when walking I moved quickly so the limp appeared slight.

Suddenly, we heard a man shout and then a child's voice burst into a wail. We both rushed to the front window. George was in the front yard, glaring down at three-year-old Russell, who was bawling and rubbing his eyes with his fists. The colored man, Pompey, squatted on the ground near a big boulder at the edge of a wide hole with a crowbar in his hands. The two men had been digging up the rocks between the house and the stakes marking the surveyed highway.

"What is the matter? What happened? Is Russell hurt?"

"He is all right," George answered with exasperation. "But he has become a nuisance. I told him to sit on the step while we moved this big rock. Just as Pompey and I had it tilted to roll out of the hole, Russ comes over and sits on the edge of the hole." Pattey gasped, her hand over her heart. "I am sorry I yelled at him and boxed his ears, but I was afraid the rock would fall back on him."

"Don't cry, darling," Pattey called. "Mother is coming. It is time for your dinner and nap anyway."

We both hurried down the stairs. Pattey gathered Russell, still sobbing, in her arms and took him indoors. Not being of any help to her, I felt compelled to stay behind to make some sort of conversation with George. He was resting on the boulder, his curly blond hair tousled and dark with sweat, his face pink from exertion. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and rolled down the sleeves of his blue smock.

"Russell did not realize the danger," I apologized. "He likes to be with you every minute."

"He should do as he is told." George was an affectionate but strict father. "I will be glad when this job is done." He gestured to the roadway, the sod overturned and trampled by the surveyors. Flies and bees hovered over the crushed clover, baking in the hot June sunshine. A pair of geese waddled in the dirt, picking at the insects.

Understanding his impatience, I sympathized. "It will not be long now, and by this time next year you will have forgotten all about the mess. Mr. Spalding says the turnpike will improve the economy of our area like the Norwich and Worcester Pike and the Providence and Killingly Pike at Pomfret Landing. Those pikes have helped the people there. The Gilberts' barter store is already doing a record business."



The old George Randall barn.



The George Randall house, built in 1798.

"Yes, thank God, the times are more prosperous now. Pomfret and Windham have become the most important towns in the county. And the West India trade has really benefitted farmers like me. The sale of livestock helped build my barn." He chuckled, remembering. "Two mules, a half dozen young turkeys, a pair of lambs, and a fat sow with her eight piglets all herded by a drover to the Landing and put on a flatboat bound for Norwich and shipped south to the West Indies. An easy enough task and a good profit."

His face glowed with pride as he stared at the big barn directly across the roadway. It was roofed with cedar shakes but was as yet unpainted. Hay had already been put into the loft, however, and the sweet smell of it every time a breeze stirred wafted over to us.

A rumble of thunder echoed in the distance. The bulging clouds racing across the sun were lowering and tumbling with the quickened breezes, a signal that soon we would have relief from the oppressive heat. In the pasture near the barn the cows stopped chewing their cud, heaved themselves up and gazed in the direction of the thunder, then started to drift toward the water hole, their calves trotting alongside.

"Was that not a splendid barn-raising, Rhoba?" George was still admiring the barn. "Just one day, and we had it up and the rafters hammered into place."

It *was* a memorable day. May twentieth, I recalled. The huge timbers lay on the ground, assembled into sections, pegged together, and numbered. In spite of eighteen strapping young men from the neighboring farms well fortified with John Barleycorn, I did not think they would be able to raise the mammoth structure. But they did, straining and grunting, with calls of encouragement from us women and the older men and children. What a cheer went up when the frame was upright and the corners tightly joined!

Then in late afternoon everyone feasted on the food we women had prepared and carried to the trestle tables outside. There was much smiling and laughter and friendliness. The happiest person was George, who kept slapping every man on the back, thanking him for the day's work and urging him to eat his fill.

"Indeed, it was a grand occasion," I started to say when we heard men's voices from Ashford way, the creak and jingle of harnesses, and the plodding thud of hooves. Over the hill trudged the

road crew of six, picks and shovels on their shoulders. A yoked pair of Durham oxen dragged a stoneboat, with their herder walking alongside, flicking a long whip over their heads. Another fellow guided a team of horses pulling a heavy wooden "dig-away barrow." All the men were young and robust, and from the way they were joking and laughing, it appeared they did not mind the thankless, strenuous job of smoothing, rounding, and ditching the road in this muggy weather.

"Greetings, sister!" Darius called to me, striding ahead of the group, his shirttail flapping in the breeze. When he was close to us, he tugged at his forelock in respect to George, his senior by eleven years. "Can we use the barn for our nooning, sir? It looks like it will come off to rain very soon."

The sky had darkened, and the swollen clouds, blocking the sun, began to let go great drops of water that raised the dust when they splattered on the ground.

"Most certainly you may use the barn, and you are welcome to draw from the well." George nodded to the men bunched up in front of him. "How far have you gotten?"

"From the Ashford line to your property bounds, Mr. Randall." I was glad to hear Darius speak with such propriety. He was a hard worker and a credit to our family. The money he earned from laboring on the roads he gave to Father and kept only a day's wages for himself. Six shillings.

"It should be easy going from here to Nightingale Brook," Darius added. "We will not have to corduroy the road except in one place on your land. Down at the bottom of the hill where it is marshy."

One of the workers, Jason Hotchkiss, gestured at a tall stone placed by the roadside. "I see you have taken old Ben Franklin's mile marker down from the Post Road. Thank ye kindly. It saves us the trouble."

A jagged streak of lightning, followed in a few seconds by an ear-splitting crack of thunder, sent the crew running to the barn. The patient oxen were left standing in the road as a deluge of rain poured down, flattening their hairy coats to a sleek dark red.

George and I made a dash for the front door, while Pompey sauntered around to the back, unmindful of the sudden, refreshing bath.

When we were inside and had shaken our rain-spattered clothes, George turned to me and spoke gravely: "Darius is a fine, strapping lad. In a few years he will be eligible to take the oath to become a Freeman. I hope to be made an elector soon. It is the public duty of every man to vote." He looked at me curiously. "I have often wondered why your father never took the oath of fidelity."

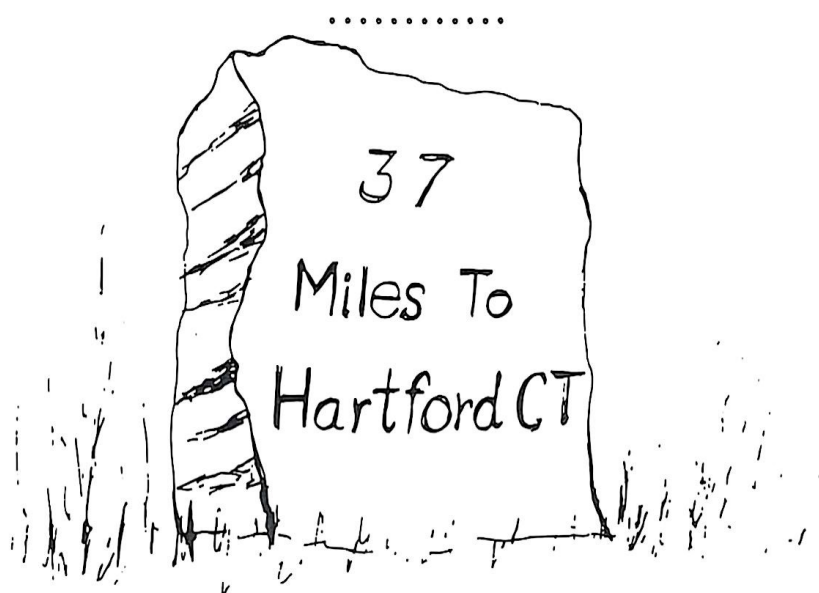
This was a subject that had been raised before among our neighbors. No one could persuade Father to present himself before the selectmen and civil authorities to be examined at one of their meetings.

"I really do not know," I answered, avoiding his direct gaze. "He is not one to get involved in such things. He has much to do at home."

Pattey's voice from the kitchen calling us to dinner gave me an excuse to take my leave. "George, please tell Pattey I do not want my dinner until I have finished cleaning upstairs."

Hastily, I climbed the stairs to the bedchamber, grabbed a rag, and began to wipe the grime off the east window.

Suddenly, a blinding flash of lightening and a crack of thunder filled the room. Rhoba dropped the dustrag in panic and shielded her head with her arms.



"Cathy! Hey, Cathy! What're you doing up there? Sleeping?" A shower of gravel hit the windowpane. I roused myself with effort, feeling groggy and heat-saturated. John was down below, standing in the driveway dressed in shorts, tank shirt, and sandals.

"Come on down. It's too hot to be working. Let's go for a swim in Alexander's Lake."

"Great idea!" I called back, shaking off my lethargy. "I'll get our suits and be there in a minute." I hated to leave the room in such a mess, with damp paper hanging in great gobs from the wall and pieces stuck to the floor. But I needed a break.

Pausing by the bed (*our* bed, not Pattey's four-poster), I could still feel Pattey's presence as if she had just left the room. The time span of a hundred years and more was like an accordion squeezed right up to the present. The feelings of Rhoba, my alter ego, still lingered in my mind. Why were these spirits of long-ago people haunting me? I had asked myself that question often. Was it my intense interest in knowing how it was in the so-called olden days? I had always felt it more romantic, more desirable to go back in time rather than forward into the unknown. Or was it something mystical in me, ESP perhaps, calling to those people of the past?

Well, Pattey, I spoke silently to her, you got your wish to be buried in the little graveyard. But you didn't know when you and Rhoba sat here talking that your unborn child, Jonathan, would live only four years and be buried in the graveyard. And your last child, a daughter, would be buried there also. Miss Patty she was called. She lived to be an old woman of eighty-four. Her birth on January 15, 1809, was the death of you.

After that episode it was as if a door had slammed shut on "my other life." There were no recurrences of living in the past, although I did have night dreams sometimes, flashes of scenes already experienced. However, these were truly dreams, fuzzy and distorted, fragmented, not like the vivid existence in another time with clear continuity and naturalness.

With the papering and painting of our bedroom the last of the major projects on my list was checked off; July and August were

spent vacationing in a rented cottage on Cape Cod and enjoying a monthlong visit with daughter Dorothy and grandchildren Todd and Becky.

Labor Day, heralding summer's end, came all too soon. We said good-bye to lazy days of tanning in the sun, of swimming and sailing, picnics and barefooted freedom, yet it was good to get home again even if the house smelled musty and dank after so many weeks of being closed up. I liked seeing the old familiar things around me, possessions that were the warp and woof of my years on earth. I had an eerie feeling when I first entered the rooms though. There was a secretive quietness about them, as if they had been musing about long-ago days that had nothing to do with me or John, as if our lives were not yet accepted into the house's memoirs.

A thorough ventilation of the place, windows and doors opened wide to let in fresh air and sunshine, soon dispelled any old spirits lurking in the corners, as I put it. We quickly resumed our daily routine, the memories of summer packed away with the bathing suits and beach umbrellas.

"I have to go to Norwich very early tomorrow morning to see an important client. Will you need the car?" John asked, interrupting my chatter about the day's activities.

We had finished dinner and had taken chairs out onto the front porch to watch the sunset ebb and twilight drift in while we lingered over our coffee. It had been a perfect September day after a week of constant rain, a day when everything appeared in vivid primary colors as in a child's storybook. The summer-parched leaves and brittle grass had come to life once more in a display of greenery that belied the autumn season. The air was soft and warm, with a blue haze on the distant hills.

"How early and why early?"

"I have to pick up Steve La France down by Pomfret Landing at six A.M. You know Steve, the new man we're breaking in for when I retire completely. One of our clients has a flight out of Bradley Field at ten-thirty A.M., so we had to set up an early meeting at his

house for him to sign some important papers before leaving for Europe.”

Pomfret Landing. A sudden, sharp shiver of excitement traveled up my spine. I had never visited the place, although it was only about six miles from our house. But I knew it was supposed to be where, in the olden days, boats coming up the Quinebaug River from Norwich landed and were unloaded. I was curious to see the site. More than that, I had a trembling inside of me, a premonition of something thrilling about to happen.

“Oh, I’m sorry, darling, but I have a dentist appointment tomorrow afternoon,” I excused myself. “Why don’t I drive you to the Landing and you go in Steve’s car.”

“Well, I guess that will be okay with him. You won’t mind getting up early?”

“Not a bit. I love the dawn.”

Famous last words. The next morning when the alarm went off, I was far from being ready to greet the cold gray dawn in any way, shape, or form. Struggling into my slacks and turtleneck sweater, still half asleep, I harbored no sense of yesterday’s anticipation at all. John had made coffee, which we gulped down from our china mugs as we got in the car and chugged onto the highway.

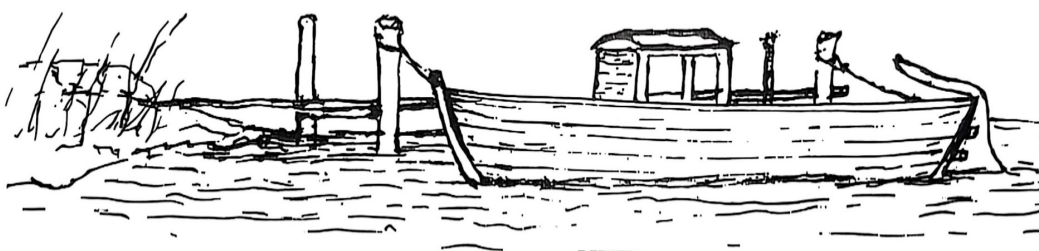
Pomfret Landing used to be on the main road from Killingly to Norwich, but now it was reached on a two-tenths of a mile, semi-circular cutoff from Route 101.

As we pulled up in back of La France’s Ford station wagon parked at the Landing, the gray blur of the landscape began to take on form and color. Looking over to the nearby Mashamoquet River, I observed the two-lane concrete bridge that led northward to Putnam and the Boston Turnpike. I could just barely make out the stone supports of an earlier bridge a few yards downstream. Across the modern bridge up the hill was visible a handful of white-painted, gray-roofed nineteenth-century houses lining the narrow road. This side of the river on my right stood a large, well-maintained Georgian-style building much like ours. A sign out front stated that it had been a tavern built in 1800 by Samuel Underwood.

John swung out of the car, and I slid over to the driver's seat. "I'll stay in Norwich all day and tend to some business, so you don't have to be back here until five o'clock." With his usual parting words of "be good," he kissed me lightly on the forehead and took off in Steve's car.

By this time, the blind, unreasoning presentiment of yesterday had returned. I knew without a doubt that one of my trances or visions was closing in on me. With a sigh of pleasant submission, I put my head down on the steering wheel, shut my eyes, and let whatever might come descend on me.

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The front door of the recently built, freshly painted red tavern banged open with a loud squeak that startled me. Darius and I were waiting on the steep bank of the Mashamoquet by the keel-boat tied up at the Pomfret Landing. A giant of a man barged out with a heavy burlap sack on his shoulder. He was dressed in baggy trousers, leather jerkin, high boots and a dirty linen shirt with sleeves rolled up to the elbows. Behind him in the doorway stood a tall, thin man, wiping his hands on a towel. From his proprietary manner, I judged him to be Mr. Underwood, the owner of the tavern, an innkeeper who never cheated on the drams of rum he sold, it was said, but who always was ready to believe someone would cheat him. Around him on the doorstep clustered a number of solemn-faced children.

"Mind you stow that sack of flaxseed where it will not get wet. Nobody will buy mildewed seed. And do not forget to come back for the side of beef and the chickens."

The big man scowled and spat as he trudged across the dirt road to the river. "I knows my business," he muttered. "Been at it long enough, God knows, so don't ye be telling me—" He stopped short when he spied Darius and me. Darius had one of Father's

spinning wheels resting on his shoulder and his knapsack on his back. My arms were laden with two baskets and a portmanteau.

"You two bumpkins going downriver?"

A reasonable enough question, but I did not like his manner of speech or the way he leered at me. He was a decidedly unattractive fellow, with long, greasy gray hair hanging loose, a big bump on his forehead, and small flinty eyes under ragged white eyebrows. I did not relish the thought of making the trip to Norwich with him, even though the day promised to be a lovely one.

"How long will it take to get to Norwich?" Darius asked.

At age twenty, Darius's frame, though not large, had filled out to give him a brawny physique, with the swell of his farm-hardened muscles visible under his coarse shirt. In spite of his placid nature, I knew he would not let any man get the better of him. This was his first trip to Norwich without Father, and he had assumed the mantle of responsibility with quiet dignity. It was also our first trip by water. To save money Father had always taken the cart and oxen before, a slow journey on the rutted and pot-holed road to Norwich.

The stocky man sized Darius up and came to the conclusion that there would be no making sport of him. He shifted his gaze downstream to where the narrow Mashamoquet joined the broad Quinebaug.

"With last week's heavy rain the river is running high and we carry a light load today." He studied the slim thirty-foot boat, with its square sail rigged forward, half full of barrels, casks, and boxes stacked under the platforms rimming the gunwales.

"If we pick up a breeze from the north, I will put up the sail. That should speed us along in jig time. With luck, if we don't tip over and feed the fishes," he winked at me, enjoying my discomfort, "we be docking at the city landing before supper. Say, in about nine hours."

So many hours, I thought with dismay! Surely we must stop along the way to refresh ourselves. As if he read my thoughts, the boatman added: "We take our nooning near Canterbury. No stops 'til then."

He busied himself rearranging the cargo, then he pivoted around and demanded of Darius: "Need six pence apiece from ye."

Darius doled out the coins from his leather purse, then ~~we~~ clambered down the bank and cautiously stepped into the rocking boat. While the boatman sauntered back to the tavern, ~~we sat~~ ~~slept~~ ly in the forward seats near the mast. Darius held the spinning wheel with care lest it hit the sides of the lurching boat, and I clutched the baskets of eggs, butter, and the two rounds of cloth-covered cheese that Mother had given me to sell in the market, plus the portmanteau with our change of clothes in it.

We had arisen early with the full moon lowering in the pitch-black sky and walked briskly down our lane to the country road, then wound our way in the moonlight to the Windham highway, taking every shortcut we knew. From there we headed east on the empty road. It took us a good two hours over hill and dale, past darkened farmhouses and fenced-in fields where placid cows huddled, vague black-and-white hulks in the dim light.

By the time we came in sight of the little settlement of Pomfret Landing, a faint orange bordered the dark-blue horizon. Soon the fiery rim of the sun reared above the jagged silhouettes of the treetops and washed away the dull gray of dawn. A buttery yellow radiance coated the fields and trees and illuminated the houses.

Now, as we waited patiently in the boat, the sun slanted its warmth on us. Finally the boatman appeared in the tavern doorway. As he plodded toward us, weighted down with the side of beef on his left shoulder and four squawking chickens in a crate in his right hand, we heard quick footsteps on the wooden bridge. A skinny lad of about twelve raced toward the keelboat, tucking his shirt into his pantaloons as he ran.

"If ye are late again, my fine fellow, I will hire another poleman," the craggy steersman snarled, untying the rope at the boat's stern. "There is aplenty in Norwich better'n the likes of ye who be wanting the job."

The breathless boy, not in the least abashed at the tongue-lashing, tumbled into the bow and grabbed a long, stout pole. Still grumbling, the big man took ahoid of the stern sculling oar and the two pushed off from the bank. The boat caught the current, and in a short distance we left the Mashamoquet, entering the unruffled waters of the Quinebaug. We were on our way!

After getting over my fear of the murky, rushing water, I

relaxed and focused my attention on the verdant countryside, the hills and valleys that were slipping by faster than our old piebald horse could gallop.

The hulking boatman's name was Thaddeus P. Cotton. He said the boat's name was *The Gullywhumper*.

"Folks call me Tiny," he said with a guffaw. That was the only time he spoke to us during the morning. To be sociable, Darius had asked: "How is the fishing? Have the shad started to run yet?" Cotton shook his head curtly and scowled, so Darius did not attempt any further conversation.

While I did not countenance Thaddeus Cotton's rough ways, I did admire his skill at handling the boat. Most of the while, he used the sculling oar, the river being deep enough in the channel, but sometimes he would drop the oar and pick up his long pole to shove the boat away from a rock and the turbulent eddies around it. The boy propped himself up against a box in the bottom of the boat and promptly fell asleep. I guessed his duties were to load and unload and to pole the boat upstream on the return trip, perhaps to put the sail up if the wind was right, which it was not the entire voyage.

Just before the bridge at Canterbury, Tiny steered the boat to the west shore—the east side rose in a steep cliff heavily wooded on the top—where a magnificent oak spread its budding branches over a level plot of meadowland. Apparently, the spot was used regularly as a midway stopping point between Pomfret Landing and Norwich, because the grass was trampled and several flat-topped rocks were arranged around the remains of a campfire.

When Darius and I had settled ourselves on a log in the campground he took a napkin-wrapped joint of lamb from his knapsack and with his jackknife cut off a few chunks, which I ate with relish, having had aught but a small bowl of porridge for breakfast. My contribution was some rye bread that Mother had stuffed around the eggs for protection. We both drank water from the river, cupping our hands for a vessel. The boy never stirred from his deep sleep, but Cotton had jumped out of the stern, and after tying the boat to a tree stump, pulled a hunk of salt pork and a biscuit from his pocket and disappeared into a thicket of alders downstream. When he reappeared a short time later, he strode

directly to the boat and motioned for us to get in.

With the warm sun overhead, the faintest of cool breezes fanning my face, and the lulling sound of the water lapping at the boat's hull, I dozed off. When I awoke the tree shadows stretched long and narrow on the hillsides. Darius told me I had missed seeing where the Pachaug River flowed into the Quinebaug at Jewett City.

"Jewett City. Is that not where Father's friend Enoch Baker lives?"

"Yes, and in about ten more miles you will see where the Shetucket and Quinebaug come together at Norwichtown. Then at Norwich the Quinebaug and Yantic join to form the Thames."

With a hint of respect in his voice, Tiny said: "Well, well. Ye know the lay of the land, by gar. But here is a puzzler. What did Norwich used to be called?"

We did not answer, so he cackled: "Chelsea. Chelsea Landing, by gar." With that he threw back his head and let out a loud guffaw. Darius and I rolled our eyes in mutual disgust.

"I will be glad to take leave of him!" I whispered behind my hand.

"So will I," Darius whispered back. Then he continued in a normal voice. "First thing to do when we arrive is to seek out Elder John Sterry. Father said he is a good Baptist and will find us lodging for the night."

"Brown's Hotel. Right on Bean Hill. Ye should go there," Tiny intruded into our conversation. "Best lodging in town. Good food and plenty of it. Ye will see all the bigwigs, the West India merchants who come to buy horses and cattle. Ye might even catch sight of Lord Bellasize with his fancy chariot and liveried servants."

We kept our mouths shut. No need to tell this jackanapes that we did not have money for a hotel or that Father did not approve of publick houses where rum and disorder went hand in hand. Anyway, Bean Hill was at some distance from the city landing.

Our silence did not deter the man. Ever since noon he had become very talkative. Darius was sure he had tumbled back in the alder thicket.

Norwich was the leading commercial and industrial center in Connecticut, Cotton avowed. The *Norwich Packet* was the best

newspaper in the state. Dr. Daniel Lathrop had opened the first apothecary shop in the state.

"The doctor has a gig the likes ye never seen. A two-wheeler with a red morocco top and a yellow body. And harken to this! On election day and training day and Thanksgiving ye cannot beat the town for amusements." This sparked our interest, which he acknowledged with a knowing grin.

"There is shooting at marks, foot races, wrestling, ball playing, horse racing, bonfires, and at the Teel House there is Italian rope-dancers and tumblers."

He bragged on about Norwich. We nodded our heads in apparent agreement, but privately I had decided I preferred the serene and gracious elegance of Pomfret Street and the quiet country surrounding it for everyday living to the hustle and bustle of Norwich. Yet that did not mean I disliked that same hustle and bustle for a day or two.

"Had ye been in town a fortnight ago, ye would have seen Marcey Bump whipped twenty stripes and branded on the hand with a M." Tiny let out another of his hideous guffaws, enjoying the shocked expression on my face.

"What a terrible thing!" I exclaimed. "The poor creature! What did she do to warrant such treatment?"

"Killed her husband, she did. Branded for murder with the big M. And all her effects be forfeited." The wretch seemed to take great satisfaction in the telling. I wanted to ask him if he had a wife but did not dare. Poor Mrs. Bump probably had been married to an oaf of a husband like Thaddeus Cotton.

Darius could see I was upset and trembling. He patted my arm, then pointed to the riverbanks, which were getting steeper until they grew into rocky bluffs as we entered the gorge just before Norwich. We sped swiftly through the parapets into the widened river.

The town of one thousand souls lay on the west side of the large bay. Houses of every description and size crowded on the series of ascending slopes. Chelsea Landing was situated at the point of land where the Quinebaug and Yantic Rivers came together. Many sloops, brigs, and keelboats were docked at the wharves as well as a big three-masted schooner. We did not waste

time in collecting our belongings and scrambling out of the boat with only a curt leave-taking. "Good riddance to him!" Darius murmured. But before we were a dozen paces away, the boatman shouted: "I'll take ye back to Pomfret Landing come Friday, the pair of ye for the price of one!"

"Thank you kindly," Darius called back. "We will be taking the stage from Mr. Brown's Hotel."

"Cost ye more and a rough ride to boot."

"Not as slow as poling upstream," Darius commented to me as we scurried up Market Street toward Main Street. He approached a barefooted urchin and inquired the whereabouts of Mr. Sterry's Book Shop and Bindery. The cheerful youngster, with a grin that displayed two missing teeth, pointed the way to Hickory Street not far off. We quickly found the shop and within the hour, I had my shoes and short gown off, leaving on my chemise and petticoat, and fell exhausted into the feather bed in a small upstairs chamber. The Sterry family had welcomed us heartily and offered the hospitality of their home with supper and lodging.

The first sound I heard in the morning was the rattle of carts on the cobblestones outside and a woman's voice calling right under my window. "Lovey, come to your breakfast now."

Wrapping my shawl around me, I slipped over to the open casement window. My chamber hung out a foot over the narrow street. Below I could see the top of Mr. Sterry's bald head. He was smoking a long-stemmed pipe while contemplating the increased activity in the street. When he heard his wife's voice, he knocked the ashes from the pipe and ducked inside. I continued to gaze at the busy scene, enjoying every minute.

Tradesmen were putting their wares on stalls in front of their shops. Women with baskets on their arms hurried toward the marketplace a few blocks away. Farmers in blue smocks, buckskin breeches, and high boots drove cows and calves before them, yelling: "Make way for bossy!" Farm lads with long, slender switches herded ewes and lambs close behind the cattle, their sheep dogs padding alongside them ignoring the curs that barked excitedly from the doorstoops. Overhead a flock of pigeons circled the rooftops. The morning shadows lingered next to the buildings on the

east side of the street, for the sun still hung low over the top of Pepper Hill across the bay. It was a beautiful morning, clear and cool.

A little barefooted girl, her gown soiled with dung, scrambled after a squealing piglet, that kept running through the legs of the cows. I worried that any minute the child would be kicked. Suddenly she pounced on the piglet, cornered in a doorway. Her face lit up with a triumphant smile as she squeezed the struggling animal and laid her cheek against its pink hairy head.

A knock on my door brought me back from the window into the chamber. Darius opened the door a crack. "Hurry and dress, Rhoba. The Sterrys are already at breakfast, and I want to eat and get to market as soon as possible."

Hastily, I drew my sprigged muslin gown from the portmanteau, shook it out, put it on, wrapped the fichu around, set my straw hat firmly on my uncombed hair, and tied the green ribbons. Then I rushed down the stairs to the kitchen, almost too excited to eat.

In the crowded marketplace, Darius found a small space for me at the corner of Water Street and Crescent. I settled myself on the little stool provided by the thoughtfulness of Mrs. Sterry, deposited the basket of eggs and butter at my feet and the rounds of cheese in my lap, and tried to appear as seasoned as the rest of the vendors.

"I will come back for you at noon. The Sterrys expect us for dinner then." Darius shouldered the spinning wheel and prepared to move off. I felt a gorge of panic rising in my throat. The color and noise and heady aromas of the town that had seemed romantic and thrilling from the haven of the house now swirled in confusion around me and filled me with unreasonable fear.

"Darius, do not leave! Let me come with you! I do not wish to be alone!"

He looked at me with sympathy and reflected for a moment. Then he patted my arm. "I will check back every so often. Do not worry, Rhoba. You will be all right. You would become too tired following me in this crowd."

My doleful expression must have given him second thoughts. He hesitated, then although it was not the proper time or place, he proceeded to lecture me in his forthright way.

"Rhobadiah, you are twenty-two and a clever young woman. You should not be so fearful. No one is going to bite you. You should have more spirit. Like Achsah."

"You want me to be sassy? And—and flirtatious like her? Father always says women must be discreet, obedient, chaste, and good keepers of the house. Everyone knows that Achsah is careless in her household chores."

"Yes, I know the Baptists preach those things for women, but it does not hurt to have a little spunk, a mind of your own. Mother certainly does. You let yourself be pushed around too much."

I looked down, avoiding his steady gaze. What he said hurt, yet I knew it to be true. Often, I felt torn between Mother's demands and Father's needs. As the oldest daughter many duties had fallen to me all my life, from housework to caring for the younger children to working in the shop on the spinning wheels. Darius was right. I must try to assert myself more.

"Very well. Go ahead." I managed a weak smile. "But do come back once in a while."

Off my self-possessed brother went, elbowing his way through the festive mob and crying out in a professional voice: "Wheels to order! Fine Saxony spinning wheels for only one dollar!"

I was too shy to call out even one word to advertise my wares. In spite of that it was not long before a servant woman bought all the eggs and the larger of the cheeses—not, however, before she had handled every egg and smelled the cheese, breaking off a small piece to taste. When she paid me the money, I spit on it for good luck as Father had told me to do. He said it was an old Lancashire custom.

So at an early hour I had only the small round of cheese to sell. Did I dare venture alone to Woodbridge and Rodman Dry Goods and Grocery Store farther up the street? It was familiar to me from the times when Father had brought me there. Darius and I had agreed to shop together, he to buy nails and gunpowder for Father and I to get a bushel of Turks Island salt, a cone of sugar, some hard soap, and a packet of needles and pins for Mother. Some ribbons for Phebe and Achsah with any spare change and, of course, sweetmeats for Ziba and Gus. Darius would be proud of me if I showed some spirit, as he called it, and did the shopping unaccompanied.

Determination and curiosity overcame my fears. Leaving Mrs. Sterry's stool with a friendly farm woman at the next stall, I pushed into the jostling throng. I arrived at the store on Main Street without incident and was pleased with myself that I was able to purchase all the needed items with the egg, butter, and cheese money, plus trading the small cheese for the ribbons. Darius would have to buy Father's things.

With the packet of pins and needles in my pocket and the other articles placed on top of the bushel basket of salt, I struggled back with the load to my old stand. Setting the basket down on the cobblestones, I plunked myself on the stool, leaned forward and laid my head on my knees to ease the ache in my back, and rested.

"How much for the Turks Island salt, miss?"

I jerked my head up and saw a heavy-set sailor standing in front of me, his cap set at a jaunty angle on his long, curly black hair, which was tied back with a piece of hemp. His face was a mass of tiny lines that made him appear older than the thirty-odd years I judged him to be from his youthful air. His deep-set eyes were alight with vitality and interest. They were the color of Pattey's jade beads.

"Oh, sir, the salt is not for sale. I just bought it."

Soberly, he persisted. "I will give you what you paid for it plus a shilling more."

I wanted to ask why he would do such a thing, yet the way his eyes were now twinkling and his mouth turning up at the corners, I was afraid of his answer. Was he making fun of me?

A little hotly, I responded: "You can walk up to Woodbridge and Rodman's and get some yourself!" Then my face reddened. I had not meant to be rude.

The sailor squatted down by me, one knee on the ground, and peered up into my face. "Now wouldn't you really like to have the extra shilling to buy something to bring home to your husband and children?"

"I have no husband, sir, nor children. So if you please—"

"Ah, the lady has no husband or children." His words seemed to mock me, yet his tone was kindly. Abruptly, he got to his feet and, with a sweep of his arm, doffed his cap.

"Allow me to introduce myself. Elisha Reynolds, second mate

of the good ship *General Lincoln* under Captain Lord."

I stared at him, wondering what in the world this was all about. For something to say, I stammered: "There are a lot of Reynolds here in town."

"Aye, distant cousins, no doubt, but I hail from Norfolk, Virginia, originally. I've been coasting so long—twenty years—and into every port on the eastern seaboard and to the West Indies that I don't call any place home."

"Your speech, the way you talk. It is different. Is it because you were born in the South?"

"I don't have much of a southern accent anymore. Seen too many ports and heard too many different tongues. Maybe I even have a bit of Irish brogue. My parents were from the old sod, County Killarney." He chuckled. "I guess you could call my speech Southern Irish." He fell silent, keeping his eyes so fixedly on me that I felt compelled to stand up to break his scrutiny.

Sensing my embarrassment, he explained: "Begging your pardon for my boldness, miss, but I been watching you sitting there all by yourself, so lonely like, and I said to myself: 'Elisha, there is a pretty young lady wanting some company.' So I decided I was the company you needed and came over to be of service."

A pretty young lady?! Me?! The plain, unpretentious spinster of Pomfret? His compliment dazed me. To change the subject, I blurted: "I have a brother named Elisha, too. He went coasting last year. That is, we think he did. We have not had a word from him. Perhaps you have heard of him in your travels? Elisha Higginbotham."

"No, Miss . . . ?" His eyebrows raised in question.

"Rhubadiah Higginbotham. Or just plain Rhoba."

"No, Miss Rhobadiah. Hardly surprising, for we've been plying only between New London and Barbados carrying livestock and produce, bringing back molasses and rum. We haven't been in any other port for a long time." He paused and glanced down Market Street to where a pieman was hawking his wares.

"How about having a tasty tart with me? My stomach tells me I've been neglecting it. A piece of hardtack was all I had this morning because I had to be off early to catch a boat bound here from New London."

"Go ahead, girlie," the farmer's wife chortled. "Go with your sailor. Your belongings will be safe with me." She had been busying herself close by, unashamedly listening to our conversation. Now her face was all smiles, as she planted herself next to us, arms akimbo on her wide hips.

I thanked her and turned hesitantly toward this man who had entered my life so unexpectedly. He offered his right arm to me in the mock imitation of a gentleman.

"I thought all sailors were rough—and vulgar. You are not though." Would he think me too forward and immodest?

He grinned. "Most of them are. It depends on your upbringing. I had a happy childhood. Raised by humble, decent, God-fearing parents. They died of smallpox within a month of each other. I was left an orphan at age fourteen. My eleven-year-old sister Lydia, also." We started walking down the street as we talked. "She went to stay with an aunt, and I chose to go to sea. As a cabin boy. Two years below decks and then I got to be a seaman, then able-bodied seaman and—"

Suddenly, we both burst out laughing. Walking together on the cobblestones, we found we swayed into each other, then out, with every step. Mr. Reynolds had a right leg limp and mine was with the left leg!

"What happened to you?" I asked, still laughing.

"Got my foot twisted in a halyard during a storm. Must have broken a small bone that did not mend right. And you?"

"A tree fell on my foot when I was a youngster. It was my fault for not getting out of the way. Father felt terrible about it and blamed himself for not watching me more carefully when he chopped the tree. It did not fall the way he planned." Could this be me, talking so much to a stranger? My heart thumped so loud I thought he must hear it.

While we were munching the blueberry tarts, giggling at the blue dribble on our chins and licking our sticky fingers, Darius came charging up. He cast a suspicious eye on the sailor and looked at me apprehensively. With my smile of reassurance, he relaxed.

"Darius, this is second mate Elisha Reynolds from the ship *General Lincoln*. And this is my brother Darius Higginbotham." The

men bobbed their heads and shook hands.

Just then, we heard the farmer's wife screech: "Here now! Let go of that, you old bawd!"

Our eyes focused on the spot where my stool was. A scraggly old woman, her mobcap askew on her stringy gray hair, the hem of her petticoat ripped and trailing like a fishnet, was struggling to drag away my basket of salt and other goods. I rushed up the street, pushing people aside in my haste to protect our precious purchases, but the buxom farmer's wife had the situation well in hand. She shook the old hag free of the basket and pulled it to the rear of her stall. The would-be sneak thief, muttering imprecations, slunk away like an alley cat.

When I had thanked my vigilant neighbor and walked back to the men, they were conversing in a friendly fashion. As I neared them, I heard Darius urge the sailor to visit us in Pomfret: "We are humble folk, but the latchstring will be out for you anytime you come." He glanced at me for approval.

"Yes, do come and see our lovely country. The apple blossoms are in full bloom now and the air is so sweet and fresh."

He sniffed the air, smelling the fetid closeness of the livestock and milling people and the rank debris-filled streets. "Not like here, you mean. Yes, I would like to come a-calling on my next shore leave. Probably in June. Thank you kindly."

"We must be going now, Rhoba." Darius took my elbow. "The noon bell will be ringing soon. First, I have to stop in at the Sign of the Black Horse to deal with the ironmonger. After dinner Elder Sterry wants to show us his new chapel."

We bid Elisha Reynolds farewell, collected our supplies, and made our way to the ironmonger's establishment.

The next day we hiked to Mr. Brown's Inn two miles north and boarded the Norwich and Worcester stage for the long journey home. Our purchases were tightly secured on top of the coach. We were thankful our baggage weighed under the fourteen-pound maximum per person or it would have cost three pence more. We had already given fifteen shillings to the driver for our passage. Mother would be horrified at the fare. Her reputation for thrift was well known in our parish.

Only two other passengers joined us inside the coach: an elderly gentleman with a beaver hat, a fashionably cut suit, and an ivory-

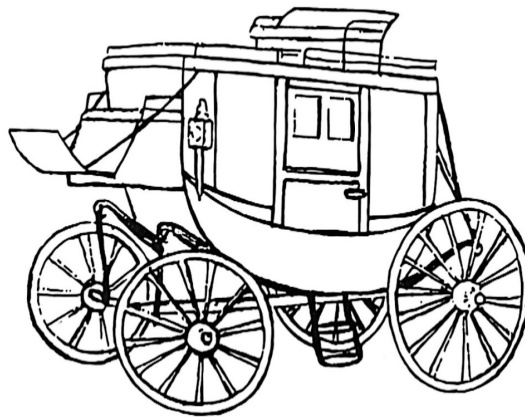
headed cane and a mousey young girl in a stylish ensemble, who must have been his granddaughter. They sat facing us.

The countryside was at its prettiest, with flowers blooming everywhere and the green of the grass and tender-leaved trees so vivid and intense they seemed to be saying, "Look at us! Look at us!" But my gaze was turned inward to thoughts of a certain sailor. His green eyes and gleeful smile filled my mind, and the lilt of his voice echoed in my ears. Darius did not disturb me, except now and then to pat my knee and beam at me in a conspiratorial manner.

We were making good time on the stony track, bumping and bouncing along, when a sudden jolt shook the coach, making the old gentleman's head hit the window hard. The young girl screamed. The old fellow raised his cane and thumped it on the floor. He wheezed in a cracked voice: "For God's sake, driver! Slow down! You will kill us all!"

The coach continued to rock back and forth, tossing Rhoba against the hard wooden side, then against Darius's sturdy body. She grabbed Darius around the waist, shoved her head into his shoulder, and held on tight.

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The sound of thumping penetrated my sleep. I lifted my head from the steering wheel and saw a young man peering in the car window on the passenger side and knocking on the glass.

"Are you all right, miss?"

I reached over and rolled the window down. "Yes, yes. I'm okay. Just fell asleep."

"I've been watching you from the house." He gestured to the old Underwood Tavern where the slight figure of a pretty young woman stood in the doorway, her silvery hair in a halo about her small face. "You've been out here, bent over the wheel, for over two hours. We were worried, so I told my wife I was going to see what's up."

"I'm all right," I assured him again. "I left my husband off very early to meet a friend. Too early, I guess, because I fell asleep." Now I'm repeating myself. Better to make a graceful, quick exit. "I live up the road away. I'll be going home now."

"Well, as long as you're all right." He straightened up and started back to the house.

"I'll be back at five o'clock to pick my husband up," I called after him so he wouldn't be nosey when I returned. It wouldn't do to have John find out about my long nap. He would immediately guess what had happened. And I didn't want to tell him yet. The telling might put a jinx on Rhoba's budding romance. At least, that's the way I felt.

When the car was safely purring along Route 101, I let my mind reminisce over the events of the dream or trance. What was fascinating and different this time was that while I had slept only two hours, Rhobadiah had experienced three whole days and two nights! A chill suddenly shuddered through me. What if I couldn't ever wake up and I stayed in that time period? But that was silly. Because here I was, and I had returned all those other times.

Another thing perplexed me. It was September now, but in that other world spring had been unfolding. Maybe it was the heavy rain of the two seasons that provided the key to that door through to the past, plus my ever-receptive state of mind. I also recalled the scene in the Abington Church when it was January in Obadiah's time and an April day in mine. The cold weather of both days might have been the common denominator. Before, my physical condition seemed to be the triggering factor. Now . . .

"Whew! The mysteries of time-travel boggle my mind!" I said aloud.

Better to think more practical thoughts, like the visit to the dentist to cover my tracks, just in case old bloodhound John Williams caught the scent.

The day passed quickly. At five o'clock sharp I drove onto the Pomfret Landing byway, but this time I parked across the road well away from the former tavern. Almost simultaneously, La France's Ford drew up alongside and John eased out.

"Hi, hon," he said as he stepped into our car, gave me a brief kiss, and slumped heavily on the seat. "Boy, what an exhausting day! Let me tell you." Then he launched into a detailed monologue of his activities. We were pulling into our driveway when he finally finished.

"So how was your day? Did you have any cavities?"

" 'Very nice' to your first question and 'no' to your second." Smiling broadly I began to hum a sea chanty.

"You seem especially happy."

"Oh, I am. Today I met an attractive young man by the name of Elisha Reynolds."

"There are a lot of Reynolds in Norwich. Is he one of them?"

"I don't think so. He's from Norfolk and is in the navy." This was getting to be fun, like a game!

"Where did you meet him?"

"In the supermarket." How clever of me! "In the salt department. He wanted to know the best brand to buy. Salt for the Old Salt. Ha! Ha! Except he wasn't old and he looked very handsome in his uniform."

John didn't think my joke was very funny. He was getting cross.

"Is there something significant about all this? Am I supposed to be jealous?"

"Who knows?" I smiled archly, edging out of the car. "He may visit me someday. You had better stay on your toes."

John pushed his door open, lurched out, and slammed it shut. "You're up to something and I'd like to know what!"

My happy mood stayed with me all evening. I imagined various plots and dialogues in which Rhoba's and Elisha's relationship grew. It wasn't until I was brushing my teeth in preparation for bed that it suddenly hit me. How stupid! Of course, the relationship didn't grow. Rhobadiah died an "old" maid. What had happened? I felt as heartsick as if she were a dear friend. I had to find out right away what had gone awry.

That was not destined to be, however. Even though I immedi-

ately haunted all the proven trance spots—the graveyard, the steps by the cellar hole, the site of the spinning wheel shop—I had no success. Trips to the Abington Church, to Pomfret Landing, and even to Norwich produced nothing. For hours I sat reviewing my research to create the right frame of mind. Then, closing my eyes, I tried to conjure up the past by force of imagination, to reenter the mystical time chamber. If those trances were a form of self-hypnosis, as John had suggested, I had failed on that score, too. The reopening into that world of long ago evaded me.



Stone steps leading down from the Higginbotham house site to Nightingale Brook.

I had almost given up until, one exceptionally warm evening in late September, John informed me he was going fishing down at Botham Hole, the dammed-up pond upstream from Obadiah's vanished manufactory, and asked if I would like to come along.

"Maybe you would like to watch me catch a big one. Or just poke around in the woods." He knew that fishing was not one of my passions, but I did enjoy sitting on a rock by the stream to admire his skill.

An early frost had turned many of the leaves red, orange, and peach. The fallen leaves littered the ground in a mosaic. Then the weather had changed, and it seemed like summer again with warm temperatures and balmy breezes. There was a benign hush over the land, nature waiting quietly, not unhappily, for the coming winter slumber.

We strolled along the old cart path through the woods to Botham Hole, John carefully guiding his fishing rod under the low branches. At the pond he slogged into the cool water without benefit of waders. I found a clean tree stump of the right height and settled down on it, a front row seat for the fishing drama.

With a couple of swishes back and forth, John threw the line gracefully forward. The dry fly landed lightly on the pond's smooth surface. Within thirty seconds the fly disappeared under the water in a big dimple that quickly churned into frothy ruffles. Keeping his rod tip up, John slowly wound the reel, the fish thrashing and fighting all the while. Pulling the line toward him with one hand and with a net in the other hand, he scooped up his catch with a shout of victory. A "mighty" eight inch brook trout! He grimaced at me.

"Well done!" I exclaimed. "A perfect pan size."

After a few more such results, I became bored and wandered off around the pond's soggy borders. Near the west side I discovered something I hadn't noticed before in my exploration—a rectangular outline of small rocks. This must have been the foundation for a shed where Obadiah confined his sheep at shearing time in the spring. He probably singled them out from here and washed them in the pond before cutting off their heavy winter coats.

With my tour of the water hole completed, I called to John that I would wait for him up at the cellar site where it was drier and more comfortable.

Lowering myself on the stone threshold that had marked the house's entrance, I contemplated the four hollowed maples lined in front of me. They still had some life in a few of their remaining limbs. The trees had survived when all else had passed away. I sighed and let the peace of the place envelop me. Not a sound broke the silence. The birds had ceased "saying their bedtime prayers," their cluckings and chirpings when they roosted. Through the treetops the silver thread of the new moon appeared

with a bright star near it in the deep azure sky, but true twilight had not yet set in. An eerie reflected light held everything in suspense.

All at once I felt an overwhelming sense of sadness, *weltschmerz* the Germans called it, world pain. No specific tragedy, just general sorrow for everyone's unfulfilled dreams and disappointments, for pitiful hopes that crumbled to be replaced by another set of sanguine expectations, those also in time to be compromised. For loved ones gone long ago and happy times not to come again. Ever.

An involuntary sob shook my chest. Tears blinded my eyes. I rubbed them with the back of my hand and whispered: "It's so sad."

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"Aye, that it is, Rhoba." Father voiced agreement. He was sitting beside me on the doorstep smoking his pipe, a habit he had taken up lately. Old Cy lay sleeping next to him, his gray muzzle between his paws.

"We have done all we can. Dr. Hubbards says she has only a few more weeks to live."

We both turned around and gazed through the open door. By the light of the horn lantern, we could see Mother in the shadowy room tucking a quilt around Phebe, who lay listlessly in the cot by the fireplace. We could hear Mother complain softly: "Phebe, you must stay covered." She brushed her hand over the thin white face. "Your fever is up again. I will get a cold rag for your forehead."

Phebe gave a tentative cough, raised herself on her elbow, and spat in the basin beside the bed. I shuddered, knowing the spittle would be streaked with blood. She collapsed back on the pillows

and plaintively whispered: "Mother, am I going to die? I want to see spring again, the lilacs in bloom, the lilies and daisies. I want to hear the robins again."

I covered my ears, not able to listen one more time to her feeble voice, repeating that refrain over and over.

Father put his arm around my shoulder. "You should not take it so hard, Rhoba. It is God's will. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh, as the Bible says. We must now pray for Phebe's soul."

"Pray?! Praying does not help! I have been on my knees a hundred times this past month, asking God to spare her, but she continues to waste away." Anger and agony rose in my throat like bitter bile.

"It is not fair!" I charged. "Phebe was always so cheerful and lively. Parson Lyon told me that Phebe meant 'bright, shining one' in Greek. That surely fits her. And she was so kind and generous to everyone. There was not a mean bone in her body. Not like—" I stopped myself, but Father knew who I meant. Achsah and I had always been at odds.

Father puffed on his pipe, studying the sturdy maples whose foliage was brilliant yellow from the cool autumn nights. Then he shifted his gaze past them to the sloping field, shorn of its corn stalks. The cows were grazing quietly among the stubble. Half to himself he murmured: "I must get the cider mill in readiness and pick the apples before too many drop off the trees. And the flax is ready for retting." Abruptly, he addressed me.

"So your young man is going to leave the sea and become a farmer. Humph! I wonder what kind of a farmer a sailor can be."

"Oh, he will do just fine! Darius will help him, and I know a lot about farming that I learned from you." I paused. "You will help us also, will you not?"

"Is he really going to buy those ten acres from Wheaton?"

"Yes. He and Mr. Wheaton have shaken hands on it. Soon, any day now, Elisha will be here and will pay him. He said this was to be his last voyage. And, Father," I added to mollify him, "our land will be near yours. I will always come to work with you in the shop when you need me."

The proposed land deal was a tender subject with Father. It represented reality. The finality of the purchase would mean that

Elisha would settle here and we would be married. Already everyone considered Elisha and me betrothed, though the banns had not yet been published in the meetinghouse. I was so happy that Pattey said I had a smile on my face from dawn to dark.

An owl hooted down by the mill, perhaps disturbed by the shouts and laughter of Ziba and August playing by the brook. Their noise carried clearly in the peaceful evening and upset me. The approaching death of their sister did not seem a reality to them. They must have found an errant ladybug because they chanted at the top of their lungs:

“Lady-bird, Lady-bird, hie thy way home.
Thy house is on fire, thy children all roam,
Except little Nan who sits in her pan
Weaving gold lace as fast as she can.”

The childish charm made me think of happier days when Phebe would poise a ladybug on her finger, chant the verse, then gently blow the insect into the air. Was it only last spring she was well and active?

Now all around us tree toads droned their unvaried chorus, a warm-weather song, but the insistent chirp of a nearby cricket was a reminder that this balmy evening in September would soon turn into the frosty nights of October.

Lulled by the familiar sounds, my thoughts strayed back to the happy times I had spent with Elisha.

I remember how excited I was that first time he had come to visit us. It was in June as he had promised. On Thursday, June sixth, to be exact. The air was heavy with the fragrance of laurel in full bloom. Nature looked her best this special day, with the leafed-out trees a fresh green, tiny bluettes speckling the dark verdant moss in the shade of the branches, and willow fern clumps standing tall with their fans delicately spread.

I had just finished the day's work on a cloth I was weaving for Mrs. Thomas Grosvenor and had put the loom and tackling aside. Going outdoors for a breath of fresh air, I saw him striding up the lane with a rolling gait, his limp not slowing him down at all.

The family was agog to see this personable stranger in sailor's garb and to hear his different manner of speaking and to listen to

his tales of life at sea and in foreign ports. Darius placed him in the best chair at the head of the table. Ziba, Gus, and the girls crowded around him, hanging on his every word. Mother was attentive also as she moved about preparing the table for tea. I helped her, putting out the pewter plates, the cups and saucers and spoons. She had spread a pewter platter with little cakes and placed it and a basin of strawberries with a pitcher of thick cream on the table. When all was done and she brought the steaming pewter teapot over from the hearth, I retired to a corner and busied myself spinning some flax. I did not want to seem forward or immodest. Although, outwardly, it was accepted that Elisha had come to visit Darius, his new-found friend, we all surmised from the many glances he cast in my direction, that he was in truth courting me. Darius sat alongside of Elisha, a smug expression on his face, as if he was the author of all that had happened.

The only one who did not seem pleased by the caller was Father. His preoccupation at the cobbler's bench mending a shoe, his sullen silence and apparent disinterest in the conversation made me uneasy. Elisha must have felt the uncharitableness also. I recalled how he had inquired politely of Father about the crops, whether the corn was ready for picking yet. Father snorted at his ignorance, then proceeded to question him about the Reynolds ancestry, his finances and religion, in short about every personal thing he could think of. I was very embarrassed. The time was not ripe for such talk. Months later, when we had pledged ourselves to each other, Elisha allowed how it was a father's right to know such things for his daughter's welfare.

Elisha spent that night with us, and the next day we strolled over to the Randall house. I wanted Pattey to meet him and later give me her opinion of him. Her enthusiastic response confirmed my warm feelings.

"I do believe you are struck with love, Rhoba," she teased.

"Oh, no, Pattey," I countered, blushing. "Elisha is just a dear friend, someone I feel very comfortable to be with."

She laughed and shook her head knowingly. "Wait and see. Friends can grow into lovers."

The second time I spent with Elisha was in Norwich in February of the following year. Darius, my ever-faithful ally, having

learned that Elisha's ship was due in port, persuaded Father that we needed a hogshead of molasses and sundry other items and that he would like to bring me to town with him for company.

This trip we took the stage both ways because of the inclement weather. Again we sojourned at the Sterry home. To pay them for their hospitality, Father sent a tanned sheepskin to be used in the book bindery, and some clean linen rags, which would go to the paper mill.

Our message to Elisha had reached him, and before I had even finished unpacking my valise, Elisha was rapping at the front door.

The next three days were blissful ones for me. For hours during the day we sauntered along Water Street, hand in hand, watching the tide rise and fall and the coasting sloops dock and unload. We spoke of our secret hopes and dreams.

A desperate desire to leave his seafaring life pervaded all of Elisha's conversation. He kept coming back to the fact that he had not had a home since his parents died twenty years ago. He was tired of the cold, hard work at sea, the poor food, of port leaves and the rowdiness of waterfront taverns.

He went on about how he was ready for a peaceful life with a comfortable home and a good woman. In turn, I related briefly my quiet, uneventful life.

We were not serious all the time, however. Elisha made me laugh so often and so much, I had to hold my cheeks to keep them from hurting. Perhaps it was the fresh sea air, but Elisha said I never looked prettier. He told me my hair was shinier with glints of red in it, my cheeks were rosier and my eyes more sparkly than the first day we met. Pattey had already told me the new glow came from love.

In the evenings, Mr. and Mrs. Sterry were kind enough to let us have the parlor while they retired upstairs. Darius made himself scarce, too. By the lamplight I read Milton's *Paradise Lost* to Elisha. Mr. Sterry gave me permission to borrow any book from his store, provided I was careful not to soil the pages. Elisha admitted he had been a poor scholar as a lad, much preferring to sit on the wharves at Norfolk to watch the sailors and longshoremen at work.

"You will have to teach me," he urged in a sober tone. "Or better yet, when we get our farm you can be the one to keep the accounts."

"Our farm?" I replied, my heart doing a somersault. Looking back, I recall thinking that was a peculiar way to propose. From that moment on we talked of nothing else but our future together, how he had saved enough money to buy some land, how he would learn to farm, and how he dearly wanted to have sons and daughters.

For my part I told him I had already started to put aside some linen napkins and sheets in a "hope" chest. We laughed at this confession, which served as my informal answer to his equally informal "our farm" proposal.

Darius concluded his errands on the third day, so I made ready to leave, the inevitable good-bye overshadowing every moment. Elisha promised to write, if only to say where he was and that he was well. My letters should be sent to the homeport of his ship, part of the West India fleet, in Norwich.

"That will cost a pretty penny!" Darius interjected, trying to relieve our somber mood.

With a tremor in his voice, Elisha informed me he would not be able to see me again for a year and a half, until early in the summer of 1802, because the captain planned to stay south and in the islands that long. In the privacy of the parlor we embraced ardently, clinging to each other, sad at the thought of a long parting, yet joyful at the prospect of our permanent union the next time we met.

The months dragged through spring, summer, fall, and winter. Then finally 1801 ended and 1802 began. On New Year's Day Father went about paying his debts, as was the custom in our parish. For me, the new year marked the beginning of what I expected to be the happiest year of my life. I counted the weeks and months until summer. June passed and still no word from my dear one.

Then one day in early July, the day before our nation's celebration of Independence, Darius stopped by the post office in Pomfret and Lemuel Grosvenor, the postmaster, gave him a letter postmarked from New York. It was from Elisha, and he wrote that he assuredly would be in Pomfret by the middle of July.

True to his word, he did arrive in the middle of July, on the fifteenth. He had hired a horse in Norwich (a decision he complained he regretted, being unaccustomed to hours in the saddle) and had followed the river road to Pomfret Landing. He left the

weary animal in Underwood's stable and walked the rest of the way.

In anticipation of Elisha's arrival, I had taken a nursing assignment in Abington at the Spalding house, which was near the highway that Elisha would be coming on. Little Loraney Spalding was abed with the measles. Guiltily, I tried to keep my attention on her—she demanded amusement more than nursing—but I was drawn to the window every few minutes to check the passersby. Even so, I almost missed Elisha. Mrs. Spalding and I were exchanging nostrums when I happened to glance out the window and spied Elisha's retreating back. His curly hair and rolling gait were unmistakable. With a hasty good-bye, I flew out of the house, through the gate, and called to him. There, in the public highway, it was not seemly to embrace. We clasped hands as our eyes locked in unspoken affection.

When we were alone after supper, I learned to my dismay that he had not come to stay. Captain Lord had entreated him to sign up for one more voyage because the ship was shorthanded.

"But this time it will be a quick trip, only six weeks. We sail to St. John and St. Thomas, deliver our cargo, take on rum, sugar, and molasses, and weigh anchor soon after."

"Six weeks is an eternity!" I cried, tears stinging my eyelids.

"Not really very long, and then we will be together for a lifetime." He hugged me, his hand smoothing my cheek as if I were a child to be calmed down.

"How long is this leave to be?" I choked back a sob.

"Five whole days. Five glorious days together." He chuckled my chin and kissed me lightly on the nose.

Unfortunately, we were together very little the first two days. He and Darius spent the daylight hours tramping over the piece of land that James Wheaton was willing to sell. When they returned for supper, Father occupied the evening hours giving advice on where our cottage should be built, what woods to clear for fields and what to keep as a wood lot, what crops to plant and when. Although he was not yet resigned to my leaving home, away from his domination, I had the feeling his acceptance was being worked out in steps.

The third day, which was a Sabbath, we attended church in Abington, both morning and afternoon services, and received the good wishes of my friends and neighbors. Elisha admitted he felt

awkward in church, that the sermon was tedious and the prayers overly lengthy.

"I haven't been to a church service for more years than I can count. The only prayers I hear are when a shipmate dies at sea and the captain reads a brief scripture from the Bible. Then whoosh! The body is consigned to its watery grave."

Following the afternoon service, Elisha plaintively asked if we could be alone for once, so I packed a picnic basket, and we set out on the little-frequented path that led northward to the new Boston and Hartford Turnpike, not the cart path by the burying ground on the way to the Randalls, but the one Father traveled on to his weekly Baptist meetings in Quasset.

Halfway between our house and the turnpike on this trail was a gigantic boulder, higher than our cottage. It rested about two dozen yards to the west of the path among a thick stand of fir trees, the needles of which fell onto the broad concave top, making a soft spot to sit or lie down. I was eager to show Elisha the rock, explaining that it had been my childhood hideout. Of course, my brothers and sisters knew about it. As youngsters they often climbed to the top to play "King of the Mountain." They soon lost interest in its attraction because of the limited possibilities for any new diversion. When they grew older they would mention the boulder now and then to their friends as a rarity, adding that it was too much trouble to climb for adults. That was for children to do. Not too much trouble for me though, if I desired an hour of solitude away from the cares of the house and shop.

When we arrived at the trysting place, I showed Elisha where to get footholds on the smaller rocks and broken fragments that leaned against the boulder. In spite of my full skirt—I had worn my best yellow calico gown, waistcoat, and silk neckerchief—I climbed easily up the familiar route, the picnic basket on my arm.

A little breathless, we reached the top, as excited as children to be up so high. Some of the crowns of the smaller trees were below us, a sea of green. I sank down on the stony platform, my skirt ballooning around me.

"Well, you certainly are an agile lass!" Elisha gazed down at me in admiration. "I never would have guessed you had two such sturdy legs." I lowered my head in modesty. It was not decent for a man to talk about a woman's legs. Yet we were to be married! I looked

up and smiled. "There is a lot about me you do not know."

"Ah, but I will," he countered and sat down beside me, giving me a hearty buss on the cheek. He drew me to him tenderly.

Truly this was love! The intense feeling that flooded my body and soul was so different from the caring I felt for my family.

"Rhoba . . . sweetheart." Words of endearment came hard for him being accustomed to a sailor's rough life. His smile teased as he took my hand and placed it over his heart, but his eyes were serious. "Rhoba, I vow I will be a good husband to you and if God wills that we have children I will work hard to provide for them." He squeezed my hand and let it drop. "I guess that sums everything up." He winked. "Now let's eat. All this lovey-dovey talk makes me hungry."

After we had eaten our picnic supper, we lay contentedly side by side, holding hands until the sun dropped from view behind the trees and a cool evening breeze stirred us. Climbing carefully down from the boulder, we sauntered along the path back to the house. Our conversation alternated between my plans for the wedding and Elisha's projects of building a cottage, clearing the land, ploughing, and planting.

Our wedding would be a simple affair, I mused. At midday under the maples or inside if it rained. Father would get Lemuel Ingalls, the justice of the peace, to perform the rituals. Mother would serve little cakes and lemonade. We would invite about twenty guests: the Randall, Hicks, Wheaton, Spalding, Bolles, Cunningham, and Esterbrook families. Perhaps the Chandlers, at least Peter and his wife. So engrossed was I in these meditations that I almost forgot what the morrow would bring.

The fifth day dawned, the day of parting again. Yet surely this would be the last time. All the family gathered in the front yard to see Elisha off. Father had let him borrow old Piebald, our plodding fifteen-year-old horse, to ride as far as Underwood's tavern where Elisha resolved to take a passage on a keelboat rather than suffer the saddle-weary hours on the trip back to Norwich. Darius would fetch our horse later.

Elisha's farewell words to me as he leaned down from the saddle and stroked my hair were: "Be a good girl and I will bring you a bolt of Chinese silk for your wedding gown."

My long reverie of those pleasant memories was broken by Achsah coming out of the house and flopping down on the ground.

"Whew! It is so hot in there! I do not understand why Mother must have the fire burning so brightly after supper."

"Your Mother likes it that way," Father answered. "She can see better to take care of Phebe."

After an interval of silence, Achsah said: "I thought your big, handsome sailor was supposed to be here by now, Rhoba." There was mockery in her voice. "Maybe he will not come. Maybe he has found another girl in another port."

"Now, now," Father admonished. "Do not be tart, Achsah."

She paid him no attention. "Did I ever tell you what Darius told me that Elisha said to him the first time you met?" Surprised but curious, I stared at her, wondering what malicious thing she would say.

"Elisha told Darius that the reason he first spoke to you was because you reminded him of his sister."

"So? What is wrong with that?"

"His *sister*, for heaven's sake! I wonder what *she* looks like. And men do not marry their sisters. At least, not that I know of. You may wait in vain."

"Achsah! Stop this tormenting!" Father was sharp in my defense.

I could not resist a verbal blow of my own and scoffed: "It is better to wait for the right man and risk your sneers than to marry a bumbling idiot!"

Achsah, so afraid of becoming an old maid though she was barely seventeen, had accepted the first proposal that had come her way, that of a callow youth from Woodstock with a pimply face, and bad teeth, who did not know his right foot from his left.

We would have continued our childish attacks on each other if we had not heard the squeak and rumbling of the oxcart, rolling up the lane from the county road. Darius had gone early in the morning to Abington to help Captain Ruggles haul rocks from his new field with the aid of our oxen.

Always eager for news from the village, we hurried toward the barn. Darius had gotten out of the cart and was starting to unyoke the oxen.

"Did everything go all right, son?" "Did you get the things I wanted at the store?" "Have you had your supper?" We all asked at once. Darius mumbled something, averting his eyes. It was unlike him to be uncommunicative. Usually, he would catch my eye first and smile. We two were the closest in the family, except for Father and me.

"You are tired, Darius," I said. "Let me—" He put his arms around me and held me tightly. A deathly cold entered my limbs. I knew beyond a doubt that something terrible had happened to Elisha. If I stood very still and did not breathe, the next moment, the terrible moment of knowing, might not come. But it did.

Darius released me and reached into the cart to pull out a newspaper, the *Norwich Times*. I could make out the masthead in the gathering gloom. Without referring to it, he recited in a monotone:

"The ship *General Lincoln*, Captain E. Lord, three days out of New London in a heavy gale lost her second mate, Elisha Reynolds, overboard."

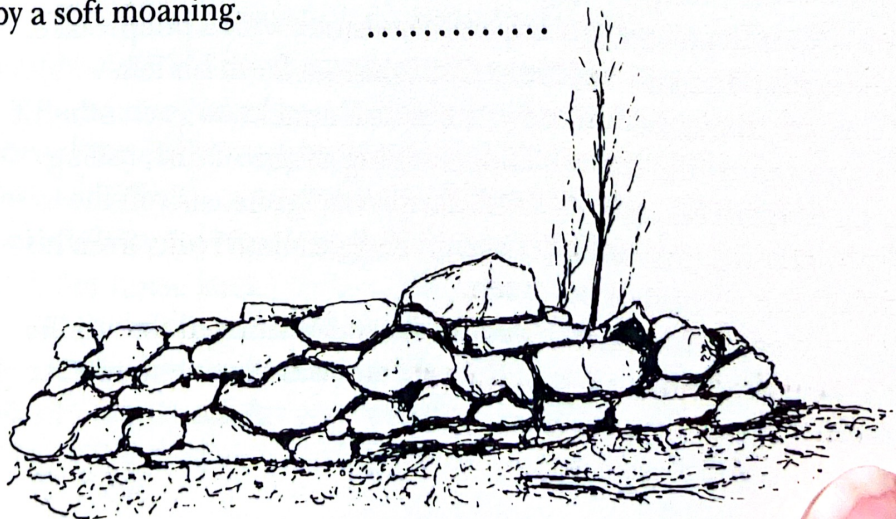
A dense fog seemed to close in around me. The voice of Darius or Father, I did not recognize which, sounded small and distant murmuring; "I am so sorry, Rhoba."

Mother must have come out of the house and heard the news, because I felt her presence. Through the shadowy mist that blurred my vision I saw her concerned expression, vague in the twilight.

"Oh, Mother!" I cried in anguish, falling into her outstretched arms. "Am I not to have a little love ever in my life?"

From the kitchen came a wracking spate of coughing, followed by a soft moaning.

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"Hey, Cathy! Wake up!" Someone nudged my back, then broke into a fit of sneezing and coughing. "Must be an allergy," a voice mumbled.

With an involuntary shudder, my eyes flew open and I became conscious of where I was. My foot had gone to sleep. I jumped up and stamped it until the "pins and needles" stopped stinging.

"John, it's you. I thought—" He sneezed mightily again.

"You probably caught cold going into that icy water without waders," I commented dully, feeling a disquiet I could not put my finger on.

Then with a sudden flash of memory, the tragic scene that had happened right in this place overwhelmed me. Rhoba's lover had drowned!

"You don't get colds from weather, just from people with colds," John asserted. "Anyway, look at this string of fish!" He held up a large twig with six small trout hanging from the v-shaped stick thrust through their gills.

"Congratulations," I murmured without enthusiasm, and stumbled toward the homeward path, barely discernible in the twilight. "We had better make tracks before it gets any darker or we won't find our way back."

The cold that didn't come from weather—or icy water—did catch up with John, and for the next week I played doctor and nurse to a feverish, snuffling, sneezing, coughing husband. His confinement did give me a chance to "come clean," to bring him up to date with the Higginbotham happenings. I felt I owed him that after all my secretiveness of the past.

"So now you know why Rhobadiah died unmarried," he said, not unsympathetically. "I suppose this will be the end of your dreams or whatever you call them."

"I sincerely hope so. I don't want to go back there and endure Rhoba's unhappiness. But, John, there is something we must do. Her gravestone needs straightening. The heavy rains have caused it to sag."

"I think I can do that for you," John agreed, obviously glad that my obsession had finally been laid to rest.

We were curled up on the sofa in front of the living room fireplace where a brisk, pungent fire of birch logs was giving off comfortable heat. John had wrapped himself in an old quilt, sticking out his hand only long enough to snatch a Kleenex from the box on the coffee table, which was littered with used tissues. I had a box of research material on my lap and was sorting through the papers to put them in order, kind of a nostalgia trip.

"Cathy, when did Phebe actually die? I don't recall a marker gravestone for her in the graveyard."

"No, there isn't any. Although according to W.P.A. records there was one in the nineteen thirties when that organization made a survey of all the cemeteries and graveyards in the state. Someone must have taken hers for a souvenir. Anyhow, the date of her death was November twenty-first, eighteen-two." I rummaged through my papers and lifted out an old newspaper, the *Norwich Courier*.

"Listen to this eulogy. Not written for Phebe, but it might as well have been. It was for a girl of the same age: 'Thus we behold a fair bloom of the morning, one of the most promising cut down in the flower of her days, bidding her inconsolable friends a long farewell, never to return. By this instance of mortality the fond hopes of anxious parents and the enjoyment of an amiable sister . . .'"

My voice quavered and tears started to form behind my eyes as the scene in the cottage became real again. Phebe in her sickbed, Dorcas hovering over her, the firelight flickering on the walls. I cleared my throat and continued: "'She has left an afflicted family and an extensive circle of sympathizing relatives and acquaintances to mourn and lament her irreparable loss.'"

I sighed and reached for a tissue to dab at my eyes. "People certainly were flowery in those days."

"Hmmm, it does kind of get you. And didn't Achsah die the following year?"

"No, that was Obadiah, who died in eighteen-three. On July twenty-sixth. Achsah didn't depart this earth until January sixth, two years later, on a 'cold and boisterous day,' according to the Almanac. She was almost twenty and she still hadn't married after all."

John chuckled. "I bet her pimply-faced beau took off for the West with the other young men. And I'll bet it didn't take her long

to find some other guy to pin her hopes on, maybe even a wealthy widower.”

I was amazed and delighted at how John had accepted my “other family.” Either he had come to believe my excursions into the past or else he was stringing me along to keep the peace. Yet he seemed truly interested in the Higginbothams.

As if he read my thoughts, he asked: “Do you think Obadiah was buried in the family plot? There was no stone marker for him.”

“Yes, I think so. At least, there are two field-stones placed upright the usual six feet apart right near Dorcas’s grave. Perhaps the family couldn’t afford a gravestone. Marble was expensive, even slate, and the carver’s labor had to be paid for.” Obadiah was no pauper, however. I had learned that in 1782 he was taxed 22 pounds on his ratable estate of 1,450 pounds. Out of 130 property owners in the Abington Parish, he was at the top of the bottom quarter. The tax that year was three pence on the pound.

“Not bad when you consider he had moved from Rhode Island only four years before,” John commented. “I wonder how much more he accumulated in the twenty years before he died. Did he leave a will?”

“Not that I could find in the town records.”

In between fits of sneezing, John gasped: “Have you tried—the state—library? They keep old documents, too.”

“Good idea. But now you are going back up to bed. You sound awful.” I scooped up the used tissues gingerly and threw them into the fire.

“Okay. But let me ask you this, Cathy. You’ve been collecting information about the Higginbotham and Randall families for a good part of the year. Do you feel satisfied? Have all your questions been answered?”

There was a lot I had learned, cold hard facts. And then there were my “visits” in the twilight zone. Yet I still had a feeling of disquiet, of something unfinished.

“Yes and no,” I said slowly. “Perhaps there is more to know. Your suggestion of the state library might turn something up. But right now you’re headed for bed.” I pulled the coughing invalid up off the sofa, slipped the quilt around his hunched shoulders, and forcibly propelled him toward the stairs.

The sick part of John’s cold was over in a week, but his croupy

cough hung on and on. After that finally cleared up, a postnasal drip made him hack incessantly. For fear of his catching another cold, we postponed our trip to the graveyard for over a month. Luckily, real winter with freezing temperatures, hard frost, and snowfalls held off. With the chores of a big Thanksgiving weekend behind us, we felt the need for fresh air and a tramp in the woods.

The sky was a pearly gray when we set out and the air nippy but delicious, like a drink of cold spring water. We unzipped our ski jackets a bit and marveled at the stillness of the day. No wind twitched the limbs of the gaunt scarecrow trees. The path was strewn with brown pine needles and tattered oak leaves that we kicked up as we strode along. John carried a long-handled spade, and I lugged an axe in case we needed it.

Just as we neared the burial ground, a horned owl rose silently from a branch of the big oak by the far wall, its huge wings dark against the somber sky.

"Kind of creepy," John remarked.

I chuckled. "It is if you believe the ghost stories people have built up about this place. In that very tree a babylike figure was supposed to have been seen, reclining on a branch. Then there's the old fellow who claims that when he takes photos of the gravestones whitish blobs and ghostly streaks appear on the film. Spirit forms."

"That's what keeps 'em coming back to Kodak," John joked.

"Well, it's accepted as gospel that the Randalls' slaves wouldn't go past the graveyard and the big oak tree at dusk. They believed the place was haunted. Then there's the claim that children's voices at play can be heard down by the brook." Suddenly, I remembered Gus and Ziba's laughter down by the brook the night that Rhoba learned of her lover's death.

"That's easily explained," John offered. "Water running over stones can sound like chuckles or giggles. Poets would call such sounds 'the murmuring brook'."

"Oh you! Don't you have any imagination? Do you have to unravel all the little intriguing mysteries of life? Can't you let yourself believe in . . ."

"'Ghosts and goblins and things that go bump in the night?' Not really. You can have all that mystical hocus-pocus stuff. Me, I like what I can see and touch."

This argument wasn't going to get us anywhere, I realized. And just when it seemed to me that John understood what I had experienced in my "travels" in the long-ago. He wanted to make light of the whole matter. He paused on the steps and surveyed the somber leaf-littered graveyard.

"Tales have really grown up about this place. Did you hear about those boys who dared each other to sleep overnight here on Halloween? The next morning they swore up and down they felt the earth move under them. Probably some mole was trying to tunnel out from under them."

"You mustn't make fun of such grave matters."

With a groan at my corny pun, John jumped down the wide granite steps and walked over to Rhobadiah's tall slate gravestone that leaned at a cockeyed angle.

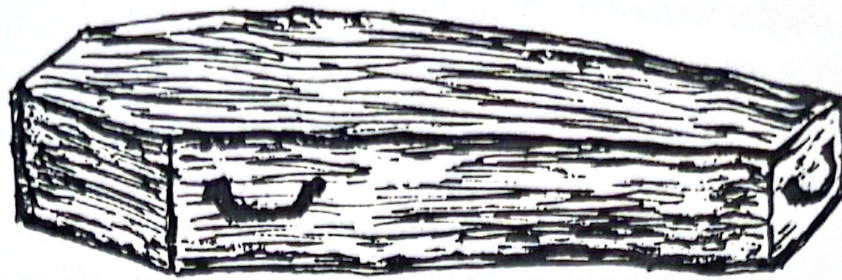
"Come over here and steady it," he called, "while I dig the earth around it. Then we'll straighten the bloomin' thing and shore it up. Right now it won't budge an inch."

For a half hour, he dug and I pushed, he dug and I rocked, he levered and I steadied, until at last we got the heavy slab to stand perpendicular. Then John tamped the ground around the base. He threw the spade down and took off his jacket.

"Whew! I've really worked up a sweat. Well, the job is done. While we're here I might as well cut up that old maple in the corner where it's fallen over the wall." He grabbed the axe and in a minute he was chopping the hard wood with characteristic vigor.

My jacket felt like an oven, too, so I shed it and draped it over the tombstone. Sauntering over to the unmarked grave that I believed to be Obadiah's, I stared down at the weed-covered space between the fieldstones. With my head bowed and my hands clasped in front of me, I let my mind slip into neutral in a kind of paralysis. My lips and cheeks started to tingle, and an eerie buzzing filled my brain as my eyes went out of focus.

As I stared and stared at the ground, the earth between the stones seemed to move, to lift up in broken sods, revealing a gaping, rectangular hole with a fringe of tiny roots sticking out of its pebbly sides.



"You had best move, Rhoba," Darius said softly and pulled at my arm. "The men have taken the coffin off the cart."

I looked up and saw that the pallbearers—James Wheaton, Israel Hicks, George Randall, and Reuben Spalding—had shouldered the blackened pine box and at an awkward gait were feeling their way down the steps. Sweat rolled down their faces as they set their burden down alongside of the grave cavity. Even for July the weather was uncommonly hot, with the sky a blaze of white heat. Shade from the big oak did not reach the middle of the graveyard at noon.

Early that morning, while there was dew on the ground to make for easier digging, Darius and Ziba had picked and shoveled the stony earth. They arrived home just in time to load the coffin onto the cart, hitch up the oxen, and put on clean shirts, on which Mother had sewn black sleeve bands. Soon a small procession of neighbors and friends began to form in the lane.

I tried not to picture my dear Father inside the coffin but could not help myself. I saw him in his worn satin breeches and best green coat, black stockings and linen shirt, his face so thin and sharp, his thick reddish hair threaded with gray—the only thing with color and life. Mother and I had washed his body two days ago and dressed him, sighing at the woeful fit of his clothes.

He had failed so terribly this past year. First it was the griping pain of dysentery, the running out of his bowels that drained the strength from him. No matter what Mother prepared, even her nourishing chicken soup and camomile tea, he could not retain. Then consumption took ahold of him. Dr. Knight treated him with tartar emetic. Both Dr. Hubbard and Dr. Hall prescribed honey, sulphur, and jalap, but none of these ministrations cured him. Through all the unpleasant sickbed duties Mother remained patient and hopeful.

Turning around, I studied her, standing straight and composed, her lips pressed tight and her chin thrust out as if she were defying death and sorrow. The furrow between her brows and the lines from her nose and mouth fortified the aspect of undaunted endurance.

Mrs. Hicks and Elizabeth had stationed themselves on either side of her in a proprietary manner, two pillars of strength or perhaps guardian angels. Elizabeth's face was flushed, as if she had just finished baking bread. At age thirty-five she appeared as old as her mother. I wish she had not let herself go, not caring how she dressed or fixed her hair. Even if she was an old maid she should be neat. I certainly tried to be. For my own sake, not for any likely suitor.

Oh, what thoughts are these at a time like this?! I shifted my attention to Achsah, who was holding August's hand and weeping softly. Gus's eyes were opened wide, darting back and forth from the assembled company to Jesse Bolles, who stood alone on the opposite side of the grave. He had ridden half the night and all morning from Providence, where he was now the steward of Brown University, changing horses twice. For his old friend, he told Dorcas, he would have ridden thrice that far to conduct the Baptist burial service.

When a respectful hush had fallen on the gathering, Mr. Bolles cleared his throat, spread his arms out in an encompassing gesture, and in a slow, low voice began.

"We have assembled today to pay tribute to the life and memory of Obadiah Higginbotham, who has now been received into the Lord's house of many mansions; therefore, our hearts are set at ease. Although we mourn the deceased, our minds are flooded with blessed memories of our associations . . ."

I tried to keep my mind on the words, to get some comfort from them. Even when Elder Bolles read the Beatitudes: "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted" and from Revelation: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying," the verses flowed from the preacher's mouth and drifted away in the sultry air like gossamer milkweed seeds with about as much meaning.

The only thought I clung to that gave me solace was the

remembrance of last May when Father took my hand and insisted on paying me for the work I had done for him in the shop these past seven years. Three shillings per week he allowed me, which came to a total of \$182. He knew he was nearing his end, and his overriding concern was for me, what he owed me, not for his other debts. I would have worked for nothing, as I had all those years before I was eighteen. Yet it was good to have money of my own to buy a bonnet or a petticoat if I wished.

The company had already sung two lines of the Baptist hymn "Unto the Hills Around Do I Lift Up" before I realized it and joined in. After we had sung another hymn, "On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry Announces That the Lord Is Nigh," Mr. Bolles concluded with a prayer in a tremolo with hands clasped and arms outstretched in front of him.

"Our God, we ask that You comfort those hearts which are heavy with sorrow and bowed down with grief. Grant that they may find in You a friend who is equal to all their needs. Preserve unto each of us the memories of this solemn hour and of him whom we loved. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

Lifting his eyes skyward as if to watch Father's spirit ascending into heaven, he pronounced: "And now may the soul of our true friend and good neighbor, Obadiah Higginbotham, sleep in the bosom of Jesus until the Great Day of Judgment comes for us all. Amen, amen, and amen."

The pallbearers slipped two ropes under the pine box and hefted it down into the trench, then stepped back, wiping their perspiring foreheads on their sleeves. One by one the mourners approached the grave, our family first, and dropped sprigs of rosemary onto the coffin. After everyone had done so, the women clustered around Mother murmuring their condolences. Pattey disengaged herself from the crowd, slipped over to me, and put her arm around my waist.

"I know you will want to stay here awhile, so I will go back with your mother and help serve the guests with cakes and cider."

"Make Achsah help you, too," I said automatically, then glanced at Pattey with a wry turn of my lips. "That was not very charitable of me. Of course, Achsah will want to see that everything goes well." I pressed her hand. "Thank you, Pattey. You are always understanding."

She left, holding onto George's arm, the prettiest woman in the group in her modish purple velvet spencer and new-style lace-trimmed pantalettes peeking out from under her petticoat. How fond I was of her, of her quick wit and sunny disposition! Suddenly, I felt a chill, a premonition that she, too, would soon know sorrow, that a grave would be opened for one of her loved ones. "Nonsense!" I could almost hear her say, as she often did, "You look too much on the dark side of life, Rhoba!"

Most of the people, led by Mother and Mr. Bolles, had moved off, out of the burying yard and down the hill toward our house. Ziba began shoveling the dark, sandy soil into the grave. At age sixteen he was stoutly built, the only one in our family inclined to excess weight. Every fourth shovel-load or so he stopped to rest, breathing noisily. His shirt stuck to his chest and back with sweat. As he leaned on the handle of the shovel with one hand, he plucked his shirt out from his body with the other hand, flapping the hem to get a little ventilation.

The only others remaining behind were Ephraim Tucker, Lemuel Ingalls, and Reuben Spalding. They had been appointed by the probate court to appraise Father's estate. Out of the corner of my eye I could see them standing in a semicircle around Darius. With half an ear, I caught some of their discussion.

"Well, Darius, you are the man of the house now." Reuben spoke with a false heartiness to offset the gloom of the occasion. I could not but smile inwardly, as sad as I felt. Darius at twenty-three might be the man of the house, but Mother with her indomitable will was surely the head of the household.

"Will you be selling the livestock and some of the land to pay your father's debts? I understand by the notes your mother gave me the other day that the amount owed came to more than four hundred dollars." The voice was that of Judge Ingalls.

Reuben cautioned: "Don't sell any land unless you have to. Your father's estate comes to about eighteen hundred dollars by my preliminary calculations. There ought to be enough of his personal items you can sell to satisfy his creditors."

"The Higginbothams always pay their debts," Darius replied with pride and a touch of newfound bravado. "The first account to be settled will be John Tucker's, the blacksmith. He has agreed to

take some of the tools from the shop as payment for the work he did for us.”

“Then you will not be making spinning wheels anymore? I thought that perhaps Rhobadiah . . .” Mr. Tucker’s voice trailed off, and I could feel their attention turned toward me.

“No,” Darius hastened to say. “Father was the craftsman. Of course, Rhoba was familiar with the entire process, but well, it is not the right sort of work for a woman.”

No more would I be going down to the shop by the brook, to hear the comforting flutter of the water wheel as its baffles filled and emptied, to spend those quiet hours of industry and intimacy with Father. The mill and manufactory was to be dismantled and the tools sold or traded to pay the debts. Death changed so much. Without the extra income from the sale of spinning wheels our circumstances would be worsened. Mother would be incessantly reminding us to scrimp and save, something we were accustomed to, but how could we be more frugal? The family would manage somehow, I thought with a sigh.

“How about the three heifers and the sheep and swine?” I heard Reuben inquire. “I could take a few of them off your hands for a fair price.”

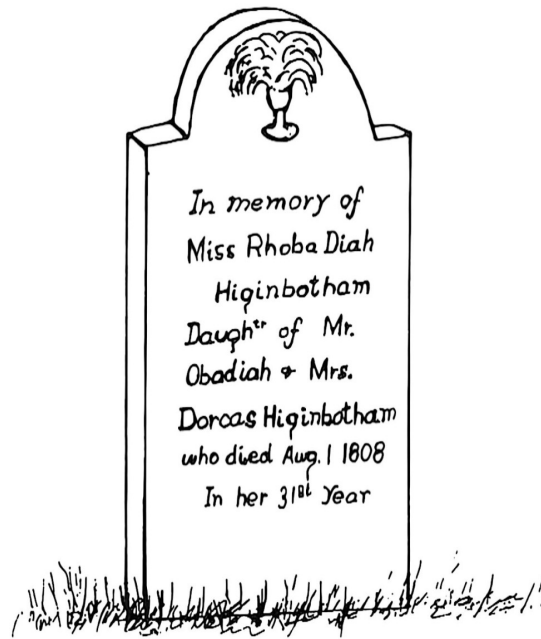
“Thank you, friend, but I intend to keep the farm going and will need all the livestock. I will heed your advice about the land. If we do have to sell, that will be my mother’s decision.” Darius started to stroll toward the steps, ushering the men along with him.

“Come! We can talk further about this over a mug of cider at the house. I am grateful for your concern.”

They passed me where I stood rooted by the graveside, staring down at the coffin now almost covered with sod. Darius, ever solicitous, headed my way. Oddly enough, I did not want his sympathy. Not yet. I did not want to share my sorrow with anyone. It was still too private, too raw an emotion. Deep in a smothering depression, I could see no joy in the dreary days ahead. Elisha, Phebe, and now Father gone.

Suddenly an uncontrollable trembling took a hold of Rhoba. Her teeth chattered and her shoulders shook as she buried her face in her hands.

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"Cathy. Cathy! Snap out of it! You're dreaming again." John stood in front of me, his warm hands gripping my shoulders. Befuddled, I gaped at him, trying to place why he was here.

"You've been standing there for the longest time. And you're shivering. Here! Put your jacket on." Robotlike, I let him help me into the down-filled parka.

"I called to you twice but you didn't respond. Where were—was it a trance again?"

My eyes focused on his anxious face. My chest heaved in a long, drawn-out sigh. "Don't worry. I'm here now. I was just paying my respects to an old friend."

"Hmph! I know. You were back there again." He thrust the axe at me. "Take this. I'll get the shovel. It's time to go home. We've straightened up the gravestone like you wanted, and I've cut up the old tree. There's nothing more for us here."

I sensed his annoyance with me. "Why are you so grumpy?" I asked.

"Because I thought you were through with all that. You yourself said you didn't want to go back there anymore."

"For the hundredth time, John, I tell you I can't help myself. There's nothing I can do to—to—" I gulped back a sob.

John put his arm around me and pulled me close. "I'm sorry.

I shouldn't blame you. Let's forget the whole damn thing!"

We trudged along in silence, each nursing hurt feelings. Then to my surprise, John asked in a low, hesitant voice: "Er, did you find out anything new? I mean, anything you didn't already know about Obadiah?"

I was slow to answer, many impressions going through my mind. "You probably want concrete facts. Well, it seems that Obadiah left an estate valued at almost two thousand dollars, a tidy sum in those days when you recall he started out as a deserter and a foreigner with just the clothes on his back. His debts were about four hundred dollars. According to my inside information."

My husband failed to catch the humor of my last remark, if he heard it at all. He tramped along, head down, listening with serious attention. Had he finally resigned himself, befuddled and uncomprehending nonetheless, to my vagaries or did he hold a suppressed conviction in the back of his mind that I had gathered my information previously and used it in a kind of play-acting? Such was not the case, however.

"Tomorrow I am determined to drive to the state library and do some heavy research. I put the trip off while you were sick. How about coming with me?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure!" John's manner was almost grim, until he lightened his expression with a devilish sidelong glance that seemed to challenge me.

The trip to the state library in Hartford, to the archives in the basement, proved to be immensely rewarding, a real treasure trove. With the pleasant cooperation of the bespectacled curator, who directed us to the proper file drawer, we found the complete inventory of Obadiah's estate: clothes, furniture, and household items, from a bread trough at 33¢ to best bed at \$28 and Bible at 25¢, farm implements like sheep shears, stone sledge, and bush scythe, livestock (pair of oxen, stub-horn cow, black heifer, red heifer, yearling heifer, nineteen sheep, ten swine) totaling \$241, and his tools used in the manufacture of spinning wheels. Total worth was \$1,607.60. Appraisers were Lemuel Ingals, Ephraim Tucker, and Reuben Spalding.

"Cathy, you said the total was two thousand."

"I said *almost* two thousand. For heaven's sake, that is close

enough! And the debts of four hundred and forty-six dollars bear me out, too!

"Look, John!" I exclaimed. "Here is a list of debt payments made by Dorcas, administratrix of her husband's estate, from the year of his death up to eighteen-seven, when apparently the final obligation was settled. His biggest creditor appears to have been Jesse Bolles. That was when Bolles was still in Woodstock, a tanner and shoemaker, making 'elegant American boots,' according to that town's history."

"Hold on! That wasn't the end of it." John had been shuffling through the papers. He picked one up and began to read.

"'At a probate court held in Pomfret on May seventh, eighteen-seven, present Thomas Grosvenor, Esq., Judge, personally appeared Dorcas Higginbotham and—'"

"Please! Spare me! Just summarize and give me the main points."

John quickly scanned the one-page document. "Well, it seems that the expenses of family support, necessities for housekeeping, and payment of the debts exceeded the personal estate. I guess the IOUs listed on that other paper were not all of the debts. Anyhow, Dorcas requested permission to sell some real estate to raise the needed money. The court granted her request and—let me see—"

He laid the document aside and fingered another sheet. It stated that at a private sale on June 27, 1807, Dorcas sold to son Darius forty-seven acres at ten dollars an acre and to daughter Rhobadiah nine acres for eighty-eight dollars, reserving the burying yard included in the tract containing about one-quarter of an acre. Dorcas signed the agreement with an X.

"So the total comes to five hundred and thirty-eight dollars. Enough to finally settle everything. See, here is the release of Dorcas from her administrative duties on July seventh, a month later. Now the remainder of the estate could be divided and distributed among the heirs. Dorcas was already given her widow's dower of thirty-one acres on the east side of Nightingale Brook with the old house there. Darius was probably living in the house on the west side with his bride, Sally Buckley. They were married five months previously."

We were seated at a long table in a secluded alcove, the stack of papers piled neatly in front of us. One by one we picked them

up, alternating between us in their perusal, then turning them face down into another orderly pile. It was my turn now.

“ ‘To Elisha, eldest son of said deceased, having gone to parts unknown and having not been heard from since . . .’ etc., etc. Okay. Elisha wasn’t given anything is the bottom line. Next: ‘To Darius, we have set one piece of land bounded as follows . . .’ etc., etc. ‘containing six acres and thirteen rods.’ To Ziba five and three-fourth acres plus a few rods. To Augustus eight acres. To Rhoba nine acres.”

John slid the next-to-last sheet of paper in front of him. “Oh, oh. Problem. Two years after this distribution, a certain Henry Perry of Woodstock came to the court asking for payment of a debt that he claimed Elisha owed him. His petition was granted, so the land had to be redivided to give Elisha—even though no one knew his whereabouts—a share, which then was presumably sold to pay Perry, who, I might add, took a long time in getting around to presenting the debt.”

John rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands and groaned. “Oh, am I tired! We’ve been at it for four hours now. One more paper, then let’s get a bite to eat and hit the road.” He leaned forward, elbows on the table, hands on either side of his temples, and absorbed the document.

“Hmm. In eighteen-seven Dorcas was appointed guardian of eleven-year-old Augustus. Then four years later Thomas Grosvenor was appointed his guardian. August was fifteen at the time, so probably Grosvenor took him on as a farm hand. Well, that’s it. Let’s call it a day.” He gathered the material and put it in the file box while I wrote in my notebook. The note taking had been my job, although we planned to Xerox most of the documents at a later date.

“So during the years after Obadiah’s death, the family was busy paying his debts and keeping body and soul together.” John was in a thoughtful mood as he lifted the box and placed it back in the proper drawer.

“I wonder what Rhobadiah did in all those years.”

“I have no idea. Probably chores from morning ’til night.” I was weary of questions with no answers. True, I had gotten quite a few answers up to this point, and I’m sure if I wanted to follow the Higginbotham descendants—not of the girls Phebe, Achsah, and

Rhobadiah, who died young and unmarried—but Darius, Ziba, and August, I would find material accumulated more systematically in modern times. Babies were born and recorded, grew up, and married with the names of husbands and wives entered in vital statistics. They had babies and so on. Generation after generation. But I was not interested in genealogy. My heart was with that first family in the Lost Village.

“If a woman didn’t marry,” I rejoined, “didn’t have children, wasn’t famous or wealthy, she remained anonymous. Rhoba was one of those ‘little people,’ unknown and unsung, lost among the millions of faceless human beings that stretch back to the beginning of time.”

“She has come alive to you—and to me,” John said quietly.

“So she has, but we only know bits and pieces.”

The examination of the documents at the state library and my vision of Obadiah’s burial seemed to lend an air of finality. The happenings of the Higginbothams were laid to rest, figuratively and literally, we both agreed. In fact, we seldom talked about them anymore.

Winter hit us hard, with arctic temperatures and several heavy snowstorms that kept us indoors for days. Two weeks in February in green, sunny but cool Florida broke up the monotony of our New England world of gray skies and white landscape.

Then spring danced in on flower petals, bird songs, and caressing breezes. Delicious, delightful, ever-fresh spring! John developed two new interests, ones he vowed he had always wanted to indulge in: antique cars and dairy farming. He bought a Reo in dilapidated condition and spent hours tinkering with it in the barn.

The dairy farming consisted of one cow that had recently calved. Fresh, wholesome milk on the table every day would make us clear-eyed and rosy-cheeked, John enthused. I was glad he didn’t mention making butter in the old churn we kept in a corner of the kitchen for ambience. At least, “Elsie,” as John had named her, didn’t require much time, only regular hours.

Meanwhile, my days were filled with a variety of things: volunteering at the hospital, church committees, choir practice, gardening, and the usual housework. As the summer approached, I began to get edgy for no apparent reason. Except that we didn’t take our accustomed vacation in Cape Cod because of the cow. To me she

was now "that damn cow." She had to be milked morning and evening, which cramped our style considerably. A reluctant but well-paid farmer from Woodstock did tend to the milking for a couple of weekends in spite of having a large herd of his own to care for, so we were able to get away.

Toward the end of July, a heat wave settled on us, with the thermometer climbing into the high nineties and sticking there. The humidity was almost 100 percent. Everything I touched was clammy. Even our shoes grew mold. My nerves were like plucked discordant violin strings, and my insides felt as if there were marbles rolling around in the blood passages.

"What's the matter, Cathy? You're so jumpy." My husband finally noticed one day. "The heat is intolerable. Maybe we can make arrangements to go to the shore this weekend." He rested his hands on my shoulders and rocked me like a baby. "And then next week I promise to find a buyer for that damn cow, as you call her."

"Thank God!" I breathed. "She really has been a millstone around our necks. But you've forgotten about this weekend. Little Todd is coming to stay with us. Bill is dropping him off on his way to Boston, some business he has there."

"What a rotten time for the little fella to come! Oh well, at least it will be easier to take the heat here than in the city. And there's more to do here. Maybe Todd would like to try his hand at milking Elsie."

I was beginning to feel more relaxed. "I'll take him swimming, and perhaps he'd like to visit the Wolf Den where Israel Putnam cornered and shot the big, bad wolf that was devouring the poor little lambs."

John gave me a pat on the rump. Then as an afterthought, he cupped my chin in his hand and looked me square in the eyes.

"Cathy, I shouldn't mention this, but—oh, it's not important. Skip it!"

"No, go on. Say it." Somehow I suspected what it might be.

In a rush of words, he blurted: "Rhobadiah's death was on August first. You identified with her so much. I mean, will that affect you in any way?"

"How could it? Don't be such a worry wart!" I gave him a smile of reassurance. "What a silly notion!"

Yet I was troubled. For the past several days I thought I heard a voice calling, always from the next room or outside. When I investigated, no one was there. Another phenomenon bothered me also. Out of the corner of my eye I would often see shadows, like someone passing by. When I turned quickly, no one was there.

Todd bounded through the front door on Friday afternoon like a puppy dog, full of energy and curiosity. His constant excited chatter crowded out any apprehension I had been feeling. The next day, after a brief dunking in the tepid pond by our house, we prepared for a picnic lunch in the Wolf Den State Park. I made the requested peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and thermos of Kool-Aid, while my grandson collected two flashlights and shoved them into his knapsack. When I told him the wolf had been killed over two hundred years ago, he bragged that he was going into the cave and see for himself where "old man Putnam" had faced the she-wolf.

The thick foliage of the trees in the park formed a canopy, a welcome screen from the intense white light of the noon sun, but it didn't do a thing for the suffocating mugginess of the atmosphere. My head began to ache. I worried that a migraine was coming on. Placing a finger on my wrist, I felt the pulse beating much too fast.

We gobbled our limp sandwiches and gulped down the Kool-Aid at a picnic table, then hurried to the steep, narrow path that led two hundred yards down to the celebrated Wolf Den. There were slabs of granite placed in step formation on the uneven trail. Todd pranced down them, counting each one until he got to a hundred and quit. I plodded along, fanning myself with my hand in a futile attempt to freshen the air.

"Here it is! I see it!" Todd called back to me. "Boy! It's neat!"

The den was a "neat" formation of huge boulders jumbled together and jutting out from the hillside next to the path. The entrance, a two-foot-wide alley, extended for about six feet in the open then retreated into a square dark hole. Todd walked boldly up the short alleyway and crouched in front of the mysterious interior passage. He shone his flashlight around the deep murky tunnel for several minutes.

"Aren't you going in, Todd?" I teased.

He looked up at me, all the bravado of an intrepid hunter gone.

"Maybe another wolf lives there now. It's awful dark in there and it smells funny." He backed out. "I seen enough. Let's go, Grandma. I'm hot and thirsty."



The wolf den of Israel Putnam fame.

Before we trudged back up the sharp incline, I read the plaque to him that was attached to the rock outside. It told how young Israel Putnam on a snowy winter's night in December of 1742 had crawled into the den three times. The first time to see if the wolf was indeed "at home." The second time he went in with his musket and shot her. "What a blast that must have been in such a small chamber!" I commented. And the third time Putnam pulled the dead wolf out.

Todd studied the dark cave entrance again. Then in little-boy subjective fashion he summed up the whole episode: "Wow! He must have been like Superman. I sure wouldn't do all those things!" And off he scampered up the hill. No, I thought, and I guess you're not destined to be a general either.

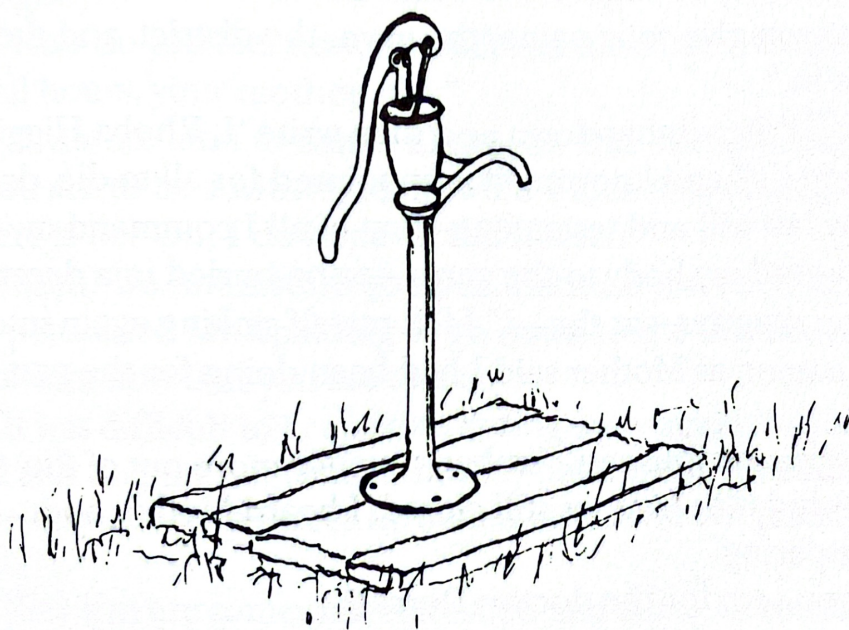
When we arrived at the parking lot, I was about done in. Todd raced over to the rusty old-fashioned pump near the picnic table and tried to get it going. I took a hold of the handle and cranked away. It took a lot of pumping to get the water flowing for our drinks and a lot of vigor that I didn't have. My head was pounding with a vengeance. I thought I would collapse.

"Grandma, your face is real red."

I let go of the pump handle. "I don't feel at all well, Todd. We have to go home right away."

How I made it home I'll never know. Todd held my hand as I staggered along the path to the car, almost blinded with black spots racing across my eyeballs. The drive home was a nightmare of painful concentration on the road. The last thing I remembered was crawling onto my bed, dizzy and panting, ready to throw up. I must have passed out then.

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"Mr. Spalding. You must write this down while my head is clear. Ah, I am burning up. Mother, will you fetch me some fresh, cool water from the well. My throat is so dry I can scarcely swallow, and I must make my will today."

My trusty old friend Reuben Spalding was sitting on a chair close by the bed, a great comfort to me. Ziba told me he had come right away when summoned this morning. He had been mowing in

his north field but laid his scythe down without hesitation and hurried here. He knew, as I did, my time was near.

"Thank you, Mother. That water helps."

I handed the cup back to her and pushed myself higher up on the pillows. Ever since Father died, Mother had let me sleep with her in the best bed. But now with my tossing and turning, the persistent itching of the dark red rash that covered my body, she used the old trundle bed. Often though she would sit in a chair in front of the fireplace and doze throughout the night, her white ruffled cap pulled down over her eyes.

"I am ready, Rhoba." Reuben had gotten up and gone to stand by the small chest under the west window. Although my head ached intensely so that I had to close my eyes to narrow slits, I could see he had a quill pen in hand, with a sheet of paper spread on the top of the chest. He dipped the pen into the small glass inkwell.

"It is customary to begin a will with: 'In the name of God, Amen.' Then you give your name, the town, the district, and the state you live in."

"Yes, yes. Write all that down and then write 'I, Rhoba Higginbotham, being sick and knowing it is appointed for all to die, do make this my last will and testament—first of all I commend my soul to God—and my body to the earth—to be buried in a decent—and Christian manner—at the—'" I felt myself sinking again into darkness, a stupor, as Mother said I had been doing for the past several days.

When my consciousness climbed up once more out of the dark unknowing with my eyes still closed, I heard Mother and Reuben whispering.

"Have you sent for the doctor, Dorcas?"

"Darius is on his way now to fetch Dr. Joseph Palmer from Ashford." Her tone became sharp. "How I wish Rhobadiah had not gone to visit that wretched hermit! But she would not obey my wishes. She was bound to take him some soup and bread and what all I do not know. His hut is filthy dirty and so is he. Covered with lice. She most likely caught the typhus there."

My thoughts were not able to form spoken words, but I argued silently with Mother: Is it not our Christian duty to heal the af-

flicted? He was an old man, sick and alone, with no one to care for him.

"Dear Rhoba. She was always my favorite ever since she was a child. Her father certainly thought the world of her." Reuben's voice carried low and clear across the room.

"Rhobadiah has been a dutiful daughter. Of course, she has always been timid and sensitive all her life. A dreamer. Obadiah was her bulwark. He gave her the affection and sympathy she seemed to need more than the others." Did Mother speak begrudgingly? Had she resented Father's and my closeness?

I opened my eyes and pushed the coverlet down to my waist, not caring if my undergarments were exposed. It was so unbearably hot. The afternoon sunlight streamed into the room and glared off the wide polished floorboards.

I must have drifted off again because the next thing I knew Elizabeth Hicks was bending over me. She touched my disarrayed hair lightly.

"How do you feel now, Rhoba? You have been sleeping for several hours, your mother said."

"You were kind to come, Elizabeth. Did Mr. Spalding ask you to? You are to be a witness to my will." I looked around the room. "Where is he? Oh, I do hope he has not left."

"Sshh! Do not disturb yourself. Because you were sleeping Ziba persuaded Mr. Spalding to go down to the brook to fish. I will call to him now that you are awake."

It was difficult to keep from fading away again. I shook my head and dug my fingernails into my palms. The incessant racket of the katydids in the trees throbbed in time to the pain in my poor head.

"So! You are somewhat refreshed and ready to continue?"

Reuben breezed in with a cheery smile, the picture of health and mature virility. Ziba and Gus followed close behind, also looking ruddy and hale. Was I the only one in the whole world sick and dying? Then I remembered the old hermit. He did not have the comfort of family and friends around him, nor clean sheets and cool hands to bathe him.

"As your executor, I will naturally pay all your just debts from your estate, Rhoba. I am sure they cannot be many. I will include

that directive in your will. Now, who will be the beneficiary of your estate?"

"I do not leave much. My clothes and my looms I bequeath to my Honorable Mother, Dorcas Higginbotham, to use and dispose of as she sees fit. My eighteen acres of land is hers also to use and improve upon. And when she dies, I bequeath the real estate to my loving brother Augustus Israel Higginbotham and to his heirs."

"Do not speak so fast. You will tire yourself. In any event, I cannot write that quickly."

"That is as it should be." Mother referred to the provisions of the will. We had discussed it before. She squatted on a stool near the bed, a bushel basket of string beans at her feet and a basin in her lap. Reuben's pen scratching, the snap, snap of the beans as Mother broke them and dropped the pieces into the basin, and the katydids' incessant clamor from the woods were the only sounds in the room.

Oh, my Mother, I thought, your hands are never idle. Nor had mine been. Well, they are idle now. No more flax to spin, no skeins to be wound on the clock reel, no cloth to be shuttled back and forth.

As I began to doze off, I heard someone humming my favorite hymn. The words came to me with new meaning: "Good Shepherd, think of me with thy most sweet compassion. Unworthy though I be, be near me when I am dying. O show thy cross to me and to my succor flying. Come, Lord, and set me free."

"Rhoba. Rhoba! Do try to stay awake. We must finish up. Is there more you wish to add to your will? Have you considered the possibility that August might die before your mother? What then?"

I roused myself and pondered for a moment. "Then, in that case, I give and bequeath my real estate to my loving brother Ziba. There, is it finished now? I would like to rest awhile."

"Yes, Rhoba. The will is now complete, all but your signature and Elizabeth's as witness." His voice faded until it was very small and far away, a pinprick of sound in a vast silence.

"Rhobadiah, Dr. Carroll is here. You remember Dr. Ephraim Carroll from Woodstock. He treated Ziba once for a boil on his back."

A hump-shouldered elderly man with a shock of white hair and alert blue eyes hovered over me and lifted my eyelids. In a

gravelly monotone, he said: "You were most likely thinking to see Dr. Palmer. Now open your mouth and let me look down your throat. Hmm." He withdrew his fingers from my mouth and continued conversing. "Dr. Palmer could not come today. I was asked to come in his stead." He drew back the coverlet and examined the rash on my chest, all the time murmuring soft little grunts.

"I have tried every remedy I know." Mother spoke matter-of-factly. "Tansy, sassafras, wormwood. Nothing seems to help."

"Will you be bleeding me, doctor? Oh, please, do not bleed me! I cannot abide those nasty, loathsome leeches."

"Why, of course we won't, Cathy. The practice of bleeding patients hasn't been done in years. You're confused. Today we give blood, not take it away."

"No, no! I remember poor old Mrs. Sanford. They bled her and she went raving mad and she—she—"

"It's all right, Cathy. Don't upset yourself. I want you to swallow this now."

"Why do you call me Cathy? My name is Rhoba. Where is Mother?" I tossed my head back and forth, trying to shake the pain, to get relief from the excruciating headache.

Outside the chamber I heard someone singing, a childish voice that threaded its way up and down the scale. A sharp reprimand cut the sound off abruptly.

"Tell Mother not to mind," I whispered weakly. "I like to hear dear Gus sing."

"It's Todd, Cathy. We'll keep him quiet."

Not Cathy. Rhoba. Rhobadiah Higginbotham on her deathbed. Blessed Jesus, come to me. Carry me away to heaven where I will see once more my beloved Elisha, my dear Father, my sweet sister Phebe. And I suppose, Achsah, too.

Awake again into the same world? Into never-ending pain and suffering? But what am I doing in Pattey's bed? In her room? Something is wrong. The bed is different. The wallpaper is different. There are shades drawn down on the windows. Strange. What is happening to me?

"Mother, it's Dorothy. How do you feel?" The woman's breath blew faintly on my cheek.

"Hot. I am eternally hot. Has Reuben written my will yet? I want to see it. Who are you? You are not my mother. I will not sign

until—oh, my head, my head! Yes, I must sign. Bring me the pen. Help me. My hand shakes so. There. It is done. Now I will sleep. It is so peaceful—to sleep—at last.”

Rhoba closed her eyes and slipped into eternal rest.

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“Thank God! Her fever has finally broken.” John was speaking to someone outside the room.

“She was at death’s door, wasn’t she? I’ve never seen a delirious person before. Who was she talking about, all those strange names and that babble about a will?” My daughter Dorothy’s voice was unmistakable with its emphasis on every noun.

“John! Dorothy!” I called feebly. “Come in and see me.”

They bustled in, all smiles, and pressed against the bedside. My husband kissed me gently on the forehead and my daughter held my hand.

“We are very relieved that you’re your old self again.” She squeezed my hand. “We were worried sick about you.”

“What day is it? The last I remember is collapsing on the bed after coming back from the Wolf Den Park.”

“That’s where I found you, white as a sheet. Your pulse was unbelievably rapid and your skin was hot and dry. The doctor said you had heat stroke.”

“But what day is it?”

“Monday, August first,” John replied, brushing the hair from my forehead. “You’ve been out of your mind for two days.”

Rhoba’s life had come to an end. Over a century and a half ago. And now for me there was no more urge or even interest in visiting that “other world.” The last chapter of her story had been written, except for a final entry in my notebook: Reuben Spalding as Rhoba’s executor paid two dollars for her coffin, made by David Goodell. Her slate gravestone, I learned, had probably come from Rhode Island and was perhaps carved by the stonecutter Ivory Soule. The initials I. S. appeared at the bottom of the stone slab.

When I was strong enough and the day was cool, John and I walked the woodland path to the graveyard. He carried a pot of chrysanthemums to place on Rhoba’s grave.

"The job we did last November seems to be holding up well," John commented, circling the gravestone and giving it a testing wiggle.

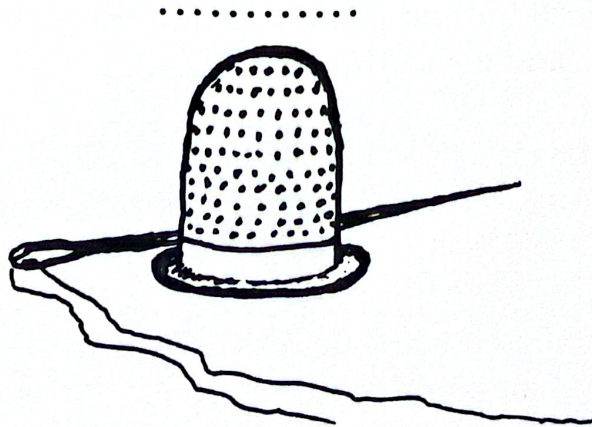
I took the flowers from him and set the pot in front of the stone. Then I groped in my pocket and pulled out a copper thimble.

"Where did you get that?" John wanted to know.

"A friend of mine had a metal detector. One day when we were fiddling with it, exploring around the house site, we found the thimble in the earth near the granite steps that lead down to the brook. It must have belonged to Rhobadiah, the one she lost as a child."

John watched me in awe as I dug a shallow hole in front of Rhoba's gravestone, laid the thimble in it, and patted soil over the spot. The thimble seemed to verify everything that had gone on before. When I straightened up, John reached for my hand. We stood with bowed heads, saying a silent prayer.

"Rest in peace, Rhoba," I whispered. "I have my own life to live now."





Inspired by the existence of a supposedly haunted environ in eastern Connecticut, author Doris B. Townshend in *The Lost Village of the Higginbothams* recounts the story of two families in post-Revolutionary times, especially that of Rhobadiah Higginbotham, a young woman who achieved no fame or place in history save for a few words on her gravestone. The story deals with her father Obadiah's desertion from the British Army, his settlement in Pomfret, his connection with the Randall family, his spinning wheel shop, and his conversion as a Baptist opposed to the state religion of Congregationalism.

Readers will be moved by this lovely and affecting tale, reconstructed partly from painstaking research of existing facts and partly from the author's imagination. They will find particularly fascinating the narrative method in which Cathy Williams of the twentieth century is immersed in Rhoba's life and times.

DORIS B. TOWNSHEND, a homemaker and community volunteer as well as a writer, lives in New Haven, Connecticut. She has five children and ten grandchildren and lives in a 186-year-old house that has been in the Townshend family for seven generations. She has been the president of many community organizations, has had numerous articles appear in area newspapers, and has had four books on local history published.